

No.

**IN THE SUPREME COURT  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

Supreme Court, U.S.

FILED

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JOSEPH F. SPANIOLO, JR.  
CLERK

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October Term, 1989  
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**FREDERICK SMITH**, in his individual and official capacity as Principal Bradford Area High School;  
**RICHARD MILLER**, in his individual and official capacity as assistant principal of the Bradford High School; and **FREDERICK SHUEY**, in his individual and official capacity as Superintendent of the Bradford Area School District

*Petitioners*

vs

**KATHLEEN STONEKING***Respondent*

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On Writ of Certiorari  
to the United States Court of  
Appeals for the Third Circuit  
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**APPENDIX TO  
PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI**

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215pp

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **Proceedings in *Smith v. Stoneking***

A.	Opinion and Order, U.S. Court of Appeals for Third Circuit, No. 87-3637, August 16, 1989 (on remand).	1
B.	Order Sur Petition for Rehearing, U.S. Court of Appeals for Third Circuit, No. 87-3637, September 12, 1989.	31
C.	Complaint, <i>Stoneking v. Bradford Area School District, et al.</i> No. 87-63 E, March 24, 1987.	35
D.	Answer to Complaint, <i>Stoneking v. Bradford Area School District, et al.</i> No. 87-63 E, June 23, 1987.	57
E.	Opinion and Order, U.S. District for Western District of Pennsylvania, No. 87-63 E., August 28, 1988, reported at 667 F.Supp. 1088 (1987)	73

F.	Order, Denial of Defendants' Petition to Appeal Issue of Statute of Limitations, U.S. Court of Appeals for Third Circuit, No. 87-8061, October 21, 1987.	117
G.	Opinion of U.S. Court of Appeals for Third Circuit, No. 87-3637, September 12, 1988.	121
H.	Order of Supreme Court of the United States, No. 88-802, March 6, 1989	151

#### **Proceedings in *Smith v. Sowers***

I.	Opinion and Order, U.S. District for Western District of Pennsylvania, No. 88-57 E., August 29, 1988, reported at 694 F.Supp. 125	155
J.	Order of U.S. Court of Appeals for Third Circuit, No. 88-3640, January 31, 1989	197
K.	Order of Supreme Court of the United States, No. 88-1350, April 3, 1989	203

- L. Order of U.S. Court of Appeals for  
Third Circuit, No. 88-3640,  
September 28, 1989

207

**A. Opinion and Order, U.S. Court of Appeals  
for Third Circuit, No. 87-3637, August 16,  
1989 (on remand)**

*Stoneking v. Bradford Area School District, et al.*



Filed: August 16, 1989

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE THIRD CIRCUIT

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NO. 87-3637

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KATHLEEN STONEKING

v.

BRADFORD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT, FREDERICK  
SMITH, in his individual and official capacity as  
principal of the Bradford Area High School;  
RICHARD MILLER, in his individual and official  
capacity as assistant principal of the Bradford Area  
High School; and FREDERICK SHUEY, in his  
individual and official capacity as Superintendent of  
the Bradford Area School District,

Frederick Smith, Richard Miller, and Frederick  
Shuey,

*Appellants*

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On Appeal from the United States District  
Court for the Western District  
of Pennsylvania (ERIE)  
(D.C. Civil No. 87-00063 E)

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Argued February 3, 1988

Decided September 12, 1988

Certiorari Granted March 6, 1989

On Remand from the Supreme Court  
of the United States March 6, 1989

Argued on Remand from the Supreme Court  
May 18, 1989

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Before: SLOVITER, STAPLETON, and  
MANSMANN, *Circuit Judges*

(Opinion filed August 16, 1989)

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### OPINION OF THE COURT

SLOVITER, *Circuit Judge*.

This case is before us on remand from the United States Supreme Court which vacated our judgment and remanded for further consideration in light of *DeShaney v. Winnebago County Department of Social Services*, 109 S. Ct. 998 (1989). This case was originally heard on the appeal of the individual

defendants from the denial by the district court of their motion for summary judgment on the grounds of qualified immunity. We affirmed, rejecting the defendants' contention that they were not alleged to have violated plaintiff's clearly established right. *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School Dist.*, 856 F.2d 594 (3d Cir. 1988) (*Stoneking I*), *vacated sub nom. Smith v. Stoneking*, 109 S. Ct. 1333 (1989). It is now incumbent upon us to reconsider that decision.<sup>1</sup>

# I.

Kathleen Stoneking filed suit under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 against the Bradford Area School District, Frederick Smith, the principal of the Bradford Area High School, Richard Miller, the assistant principal, and Frederick Shuey, the superintendent of the School District. Each of the individual defendants was sued in both his individual and official capacity. Stoneking prayed for relief in the form of compensatory and punitive damages against Shuey, Smith, Miller and the School District.

Stoneking's complaint alleged that Edward Wright, a School District employee who was the Band Director at Bradford High, used physical force, threats of reprisal, intimidation and coercion to sexually abuse and harass her and to force her to engage in various sexual acts beginning October 1980, when she was a high school student, and continuing through Stoneking's sophomore, junior and senior

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1. Appellants argue that the fact that the Supreme Court has remanded this case for reconsideration in light of *DeShaney* "strongly suggest[s]" that *DeShaney* is indistinguishable and controls the outcome of this case. Appellants' Supplemental Brief on Remand at 8. We know of no authority for the proposition that a direction that we give "further consideration" to a case is in effect a direction as to the outcome. If the Supreme Court wished to direct an outcome, we are confident that it would have so stated.

years until her graduation in 1983 and thereafter until 1985. Defendants concede that some of these acts occurred in the band room at the high school and on trips for band functions, as well as in Wright's car and in his house while Stoneking babysat or after he gave her a music lesson. Wright was ultimately prosecuted for various sex-related crimes and pled guilty.

Stoneking averred that in 1979, before Wright's actions toward her, another female member of the band informed Smith that Wright had attempted to rape or sexually assault her; that Smith, in his capacity as principal, maintained a personal file on Wright which contained reports of complaints of sexual misconduct by female students in the band program; that Smith announced to Wright a "policy" with respect to his contact with female students under which he was to have no further "one on one" contacts with female band members; that Smith, Miller and Shuey "failed to take any action to protect the health, safety and welfare of the female student body" and Stoneking, App. at 10; that Miller and Shuey were also on notice of the complaints of sexual misconduct by Wright and of the policy adopted by Smith under which Wright was to have no one-on-one conduct with female band members, or, if Shuey was not aware, it was because of "the defective and deficient policies and customs" of the School District, App. at 11; and that Wright threatened his victims that if they reported his actions they would incur "loss of parental support, the esteem of friends and the dissolution of the school band which had become . . . a significant institution to the School District and the community in general," App. at 12.

After discovery in this case and in cases filed by other students who alleged they were also sexually abused by Wright, defendants moved for summary

judgment in the actions against them in their individual capacities on the basis of qualified immunity. As we explained in our earlier opinion, defendants contended that "no clearly settled law existed, either at the time of the incidents complained of in the plaintiff's Complaint or as of the present time, which would cause a reasonable person to know either of the constitutional right which allegedly has been violated or that the alleged acts or failure to act on the part of the individual defendants would lead to a violation of that constitutional right." See 856 F.2d at 596.

The district court denied the defendants' motion for summary judgment, holding that there was evidence from which a jury could conclude that defendants were reckless in their handling of an incident of abuse which had been reported to Smith in 1979, in their failure to investigate other reported incidents involving Wright and other female students, and in their attempts to remedy and/or rectify the problems involving Wright. *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School Dist.*, 667 F. Supp. 1088, 1098 (W.D. Pa. 1987).-

On appeal, defendants argued that they were entitled to qualified immunity because they had no clearly established duty to protect Stoneking, and therefore there was no basis upon which a violation of 42 U.S.C. § 1983 could be predicated. We rejected that contention, holding that under the applicable state law a special relationship arose between the school officials and students entrusted to their care, and that the Pennsylvania child abuse reporting and *in loco parentis* statutes, coupled with the broad common law duty of officials to students, evidenced a desire on the part of the state to provide affirmative protection to students. 856 F.2d at 603. Defendants now argue that the Supreme Court's decision in *DeShaney*

controls our decision and mandates a holding that the school authorities owed no constitutional duty of protection to Stoneking.

In *DeShaney*, the Court held that a minor could not maintain an action against Winnebago County, its Department of Social Services, and various individual employees of the Department for injuries he received at the hands of his father, even though the county caseworker returned DeShaney to the father's custody and allegedly knew or should have known of the risk of violence to him at his father's hands. The Court's analysis was straightforward: it held that "a State's failure to protect an individual against private violence simply does not constitute a violation of the Due Process Clause." 109 S. Ct. at 1004. It rejected the analysis adopted by, *inter alia*, this court in *Estate of Bailey by Oare v. County of York*, 768 F.2d 503, 510-11 (3d Cir. 1985), that under similar circumstances a "special relationship" arose between the state and the child which imposed an affirmative constitutional duty to provide adequate protection.

The Court held that because there was no constitutional duty on the state to provide its citizens with particular protective services, "the State cannot be held liable under the [Due Process] Clause for injuries that could have been averted had it chosen to provide them." 109 S. Ct. 1004 (footnote omitted). It distinguished DeShaney's situation from those "limited circumstances [in which] the Constitution imposes upon the State affirmative duties of care and protection with respect to particular individuals." 109 S. Ct. at 1004-05. It stated that prior cases stood only for the proposition that, "when the State takes a person into its custody and holds him there against his will, the Constitution imposes upon it a corresponding duty to assume some responsibility for his safety and general well-being," 109 S. Ct. at

1005-06 (citing *Youngberg v. Romeo*, 457 U.S. 307, 317 (1982) (state must provide involuntarily committed mental patients with services necessary to insure their reasonable safety), and *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 103-04 (1976) (prison authorities must treat medical needs of an inmate)).

In light of the Supreme Court's discussion in *DeShaney* distinguishing between affirmative duties of care and protection imposed by a state on its agents and constitutional duties to protect, we can no longer rely on the statutory and common law duties imposed in Pennsylvania on school officials as the basis of a duty to protect students from harm occurring as a result of a third person.

Arguably, our earlier discussion noting that "students are in what may be viewed as functional custody of the school authorities" during their presence at school because they are required to attend under Pennsylvania law, see 856 F.2d at 601 (citing 24 Pa. Stat. Ann. § 13-1327 (Purdon Supp. 1988)), is not inconsistent with the *DeShaney* opinion. In *DeShaney*, the Court stated that "[h]ad the State by the affirmative exercise of its power removed Joshua from free society and placed him in a foster home operated by its agents, we might have a situation sufficiently analogous to incarceration or institutionalization to give rise to an affirmative duty to protect." 109 S. Ct. at 1006 n.9. The Court then explicitly referred to court of appeals cases holding, by analogy to *Estelle* and *Youngberg*, "that the State may be held liable under the Due Process Clause for failing to protect children in foster homes from mistreatment at the hands of their foster parents," but expressed no view on the validity of this analogy. *Id.* (citing *Doe v. New York City Dept. of Social Services*, 649 F.2d 134, 141-42 (2d Cir. 1981); *Taylor ex rel. Walker v.*

*Ledbetter*, 818 F.2d 791, 794-97 (11th Cir. 1987) (en banc), *cert. denied*, 109 S. Ct. 1337 (1989)).

The situation of school children, compelled by state law to attend school, who are physically mistreated by School District employees, may not be dissimilar to that of children in foster homes mistreated by their foster parents. However, we prefer not to rest our decision again on an affirmative duty to protect such students in this situation because the uncertainty of the law in this respect may cause further delay. We are advised that the trial of this case against the School District and the defendants in their official capacities has been held up during the pendency of the appeal by defendants on the denial of their motion for summary judgment on the claims against them in their individual capacities. Therefore, we believe it is more expedient to decide whether plaintiff's claim before us would withstand summary judgment even if we could not rely on the special relationship which the Supreme Court's footnote in *DeShaney* may still leave as a viable basis for liability.

## II.

The principal distinction between *DeShaney's* situation and that of *Stoneking* is that *DeShaney's* injuries resulted at the hands of a private actor, whereas *Stoneking's* resulted from the actions of a state employee. The significance of the status of the perpetrator as a private actor rather than as a state official is referred to on numerous occasions in the *DeShaney* opinion. Not only is the Court's statement of the holding in terms of the identity of the actor ("a State's failure to protect an individual *against private violence* simply does not constitute a violation of the Due Process Clause," *id.* at 1004), but the analytic steps taken by the Court to reach that holding continuously take note of the status of the person

responsible for the injuries. See, e.g., "nothing in the language of the Due Process Clause itself requires the state to protect the life, liberty and property of its citizens *against invasion by private actors*;" the Due Process Clause "forbids *the State itself* to deprive individuals of life, liberty or property without 'due process of law,' but its language cannot fairly be extended to impose an affirmative obligation on the State to insure that those interests do not come to harm *through other means*;" the purpose of the Due Process Clause "was to protect the people *from the State*, not to insure that the State protected them *from each other*." 109 S. Ct. at 1003 (emphasis added).

Unlike DeShaney's father, who was referred to throughout the *DeShaney* opinion as a private third party, Wright was a school district employee subject to defendants' immediate control. In fact, many of Wright's interactions with Stoneking occurred in the course of his performance of his official responsibilities, such as during school-sponsored events and trips, and sometimes on school property.

It is immaterial for this purpose whether Wright's sexual abuse is viewed as attributable to the state. This consideration would be relevant had Stoneking sued Wright under section 1983, alleging that he acted under color of state law. She did not. Instead, the suit is against the School District and its supervisory officials, and they were incontestably acting under color of state law.

Defendants argue that Stoneking's emphasis on the fact that Wright was an agent and employee of the school district is merely an assertion of "supervisory liability", or *respondeat superior*, which cannot be a basis of liability. See *Monell v. New York City Dep't of Social Servs.*, 436 U.S. 658, 691 (1978). However, this is not a case in which Stoneking alleges that

defendants are vicariously liable because of Wright's actions. Instead, she argues defendants are liable because of their own actions in adopting and maintaining a practice, custom or policy of reckless indifference to instances of known or suspected sexual abuse of students by teachers, in concealing complaints of abuse, and in discouraging students' complaints about such conduct. She argues that these practices, customs or policies created a climate which, at a minimum, facilitated sexual abuse of students by teachers in general, and that there was a causal relationship between these practices, customs or policies and the repeated sexual assaults against her by Wright. Thus, this is not *respondeat superior* in another guise, but an assertion of liability against the individual defendants based on theories recognized in a line of Supreme Court cases.

Nothing in *DeShaney* suggests that state officials may escape liability arising from their policies maintained in deliberate indifference to actions taken by their subordinates. As the Supreme Court recently reconfirmed in *City of Canton v. Harris*, 109 S. Ct. 1197, 1205 (1989), a municipality may be liable under section 1983 where its policymakers made "a deliberate choice to follow a course of action . . . from among various alternatives," (quoting *Pembauer v. Cincinnati*, 475 U.S. 469, 483-84 (1986) (plurality op.)), and the policy chosen "reflects deliberate indifference to the constitutional rights of [the city's] inhabitants," 109 S. Ct. at 1206. See also *Monell*, 436 U.S. at 690-91 (1978) (government body may be sued for constitutional deprivations visited pursuant to governmental "custom", "practices" or "usage").

This is an independent basis for liability previously pled and preserved by Stoneking which is unrelated to the issue decided in *DeShaney*. Liability of municipal policymakers for policies or customs

chosen or recklessly maintained is not dependent upon the existence of a "special relationship" between the municipal officials and the individuals harmed. See *Bordonaro v. McLeod*, 871 F.2d 1151 (1st Cir. 1989), *petition for cert. filed*, 57 U.S.L.W. 3843 (U.S. June 18, 1989) (No. 88-2036) (liability against police chief and mayor for unauthorized action of police officers in forcing entry into bar and beating patrons based on the police officials' constructive knowledge of custom and deficient policies in recruitment and training).

Thus, to the extent that the Supreme Court's remand of this case in light of *DeShaney* required us to consider whether Stoneking still may maintain a viable section 1983 claim if there is no predicate duty by defendants to protect her, we hold that she may because she has also alleged that defendants, with deliberate indifference to the consequences, established and maintained a policy, practice or custom which directly caused her constitutional harm.

### III.

Defendants argue that Wright cannot be considered to have been acting pursuant to any School District policy and that it is outlandish and scandalous of Stoneking to suggest "that the school officials actually wanted and encouraged teachers to sexually abuse their students." Appellants' Supplemental Brief on Remand at 25. Stoneking did not, and need not, so suggest. As the Supreme Court stated in *Canton*, "[i]t may seem contrary to common sense to assert that a municipality will actually have a policy of not taking reasonable steps to train its employees." 109 S. Ct. at 1205. Nonetheless, it continued, if the need for more or different training is so obvious, and the inadequacy so likely to result in

the violation of constitutional rights. "the policymakers of the city can reasonably be said to have been deliberately indifferent to the need." *Id.* It continued, "[i]n that event, the failure to provide proper training may fairly be said to represent a policy for which the city is responsible, and for which the city may be held liable if it actually causes injury." *Id.*

In any event, appellants' argument that there was no policy, custom or practice is a merits issue, which we cannot resolve on this interlocutory appeal. If there are contested issues of material fact, they must go to the jury. *See Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 527 (1985) ("claim of immunity is conceptually distinct from the merits of the plaintiff's claim"); *Turpin v. Mailet*, 619 F.2d 196, 201 (2d Cir.), *cert. denied*, 449 U.S. 1016 (1980) ("The issue of authorization, approval or encouragement is generally one of fact, not law."). As we suggested in *Chinchello v. Fenton*, 805 F.2d 126, 130-31 (3d Cir. 1986), the denial of a motion for summary judgment claiming qualified immunity based on the "I didn't do it" defense will not be immediately appealable under *Mitchell*. Nonetheless, we believe that we must decide whether Stoneking has produced evidence sufficient to create a material issue of fact about the existence of a custom, practice or policy of deliberate indifference to misconduct by teachers, since that is directly related to the "fact-specific" inquiry into the qualified immunity defense asserted by defendants. *Anderson*, 483 U.S. at 641.

#### IV.

The principles applicable to defendants' assertion of qualified immunity have not changed to any significant degree since our opinion in *Stoneking I*. It is the defendants' burden to establish that they are entitled to such immunity. *Ryan v. Burlington*

*County*, 860 F.2d 1199, 1204 n.9 (3d Cir. 1988), *cert. denied*, 109 S. Ct. 1745 (1989). The defendants must show that their conduct did "not violate clearly established statutory or constitutional rights of which a reasonable person would have known." *Harlow v. Fitzgerald*, 457 U.S. 800, 818 (1982).

Under the test announced in *Harlow*, reasonableness is measured by an objective standard; arguments that the defendants desired to handle or subjectively believed that they had handled the incidents properly are irrelevant. *Anderson v. Creighton*, 483 U.S. 635, 641 (1987). The defendants are entitled to qualified immunity if reasonable officials in the defendants' position at the relevant time could have believed, in light of clearly established law, that their conduct comported with established legal standards. *See id.* at 641.

*Harlow* explicitly chose not to discuss the question of how to evaluate the "'state of the law'" during prior periods, leaving this issue to the lower courts. *See* 457 U.S. at 818 n.32 (citation omitted). This court does not require "relatively strict factual identity" between applicable precedent and the case at issue. *People of Three Mile Island v. Nuclear Regulatory Comm.*, 747 F.2d 139, 144 (3d Cir. 1984). "[S]ome but not precise factual correspondence" to precedent would be required. *Id.*; *see also Anderson*, 483 U.S. at 640.

We expect officials to "apply general, well-developed legal principles." *People of Three Mile Island*, 747 F.2d at 144. We have explained that we have "adopted a broad view of what constitutes an established right of which a reasonable person would have known," *Sourbeer v. Robinson*, 791 F.2d 1094, 1103 (3d Cir. 1986), *cert. denied*, 483 U.S. 1032 (1987), which requires us to undertake "an inquiry into the general legal principles governing analogous

factual situations, if any, and a subsequent determination whether the official should have related this established law to the instant situation." *Hicks v. Feeney*, 770 F.2d 375, 380 (3d Cir. 1985).

It may seem ludicrous to be obliged to consider whether it was "clearly established" that it was impermissible for school teachers and staff to sexually molest students. Nonetheless, we construe the proper inquiry as whether it was established that the students' rights were constitutionally based. Applying this standard, we reiterate the conclusion we reached in *Stoneking I* that the constitutional right *Stoneking* alleges, to freedom from invasion of her personal security through sexual abuse, was well-established at the time the assaults upon her occurred. The Supreme Court in considering the closely analogous right implicated by corporal punishment in schools, held that "[a]mong the historic liberties . . . protected [by the Due Process Clause] was a right to be free from . . . unjustified intrusions on personal security." *Ingraham v. Wright*, 430 U.S. 651, 673 & n.41 (1977).<sup>2</sup> See also *Black v. Stephens*, 662 F.2d 181, 188 (3d Cir. 1981), *cert. denied*, 455 U.S. 1008 (1982) ("[a] law enforcement officer's infliction of personal injury on a person . . . may deprive a victim of a fourteenth amendeent 'liberty'"); *Curtis v. Everette*,

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2. By 1980, this circuit had invoked *Ingraham v. Wright* in varied contexts. See, e.g., *Romeo v. Youngberg*, 644 F.2d 147 (3d Cir. 1980) (in banc) (right of mentally retarded to freedom from assault in state institution), *vacated on other grounds*, 457 U.S. 307, 315 (1982) (but agreeing with court's application of *Ingraham*); *Halderman v. Pennhurst State School and Hospital*, 612 F.2d 84, 98 (3d Cir. 1979) (in banc), *rev'd*, 452 U.S. 1 (1981); *United States ex. rel. Caruso v. United States Board of Parole*, 570 F.2d 1150, 1157 (3d Cir.), *cert. denied*, 436 U.S. 911 (1978) (considering parole revocation challenge; noting that liberty for due process purposes extends to "[p]ersonal security from physical violence").

489 F.2d 516, 518-19 (3d Cir. 1973), *cert. denied*, 416 U.S. 995 (1974) (prisoner's liberty interest implicated in assault by fellow prisoner).

A teacher's sexual molestation of a student is an intrusion of the schoolchild's bodily integrity not substantively different for constitutional purposes from corporal punishment by teachers. Reasonable officials would have understood the "contours" of a student's right to bodily integrity, under the Due Process Clause, to encompass a student's right to be free from sexual assaults by his or her teachers. See *Anderson*, 483 U.S. at 639-40 (discussing level of particularity required for definition of clearly established rights).

Since a teacher's sexual molestation of a student could not possibly be deemed an acceptable practice, as some view teacher-inflicted corporal punishment, a student's right to be free from such molestation may be viewed as clearly established even before *Ingraham*. See *Rochin v. California*, 342 U.S. 165, 172 (1952) (substantive due process violation occurs where conduct "shocks the conscience"); cf. *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 534 (1985) (right against warrantless security wiretaps was not "clearly established" where many successive administrations employed the practice and considered it constitutional).

We turn then from the issue of the clearly established constitutional right of Stoneking to be free from sexual abuse by school staff to an inquiry into the objective reasonableness of defendants' conduct from late 1980 through at least 1983 when Stoneking was molested by Wright while still a student. *Anderson* teaches us that this inquiry into reasonableness requires examination of the information possessed by the defendants. 483 U.S. at 641. We set forth some of the evidence in the record

because the parties now agree that we are not limited to the allegations of the complaint on which our prior opinion was based. *But see Stoneking I*, 856 F.2d at 597-98 nn.5, 6 & 7.

According to the deposition testimony of Theresa Rodgers, her social studies teacher Richard DeMarte sexually accosted her in late 1977 or early 1978. *See* 667 F. Supp. at 1100 (summarizing Rodgers deposition). She immediately reported the incident to Miller and Smith. They responded by warning her that it would be her word against the teacher's and that she should not tell her parents. *Id.* Although Smith told Rodgers that he would "take care" of the problem, DeMarte's personnel file shows no evidence of any disciplinary action taken against him; to the contrary, his teaching evaluation showed a perfect score. *Id.*

According to the deposition testimony of Judith Grove Sowers, she was sexually assaulted by Wright in 1979 and reported the incident to Miller and Smith. She claims that Smith told her "it was my [Sowers'] fault. That's why he wanted to clear up the rumors because he wanted the band to get back on their feet again. . . . He had told me that if the rumors were true . . . I could find myself in front of a jury, in front of a judge, telling exactly what happened, that being that I had been drinking [and that I was] at his house voluntarily . . . I wouldn't look very good is what he said." *Id.* at 1101 n.24 (quoting deposition). Miller brought Wright to the office, asked Sowers to repeat her allegation in front of him, and asked Wright if it was true, which Wright denied. Supp. App. at 7 (Sowers deposition).

According to the deposition testimony of Sowers' father, who requested a conference with Miller and Sowers about the incident, the defendants attempted to persuade him that no teacher would behave as his daughter alleged. 667 F. Supp. at 1101 (citing

deposition testimony). Both Sowers and her father testified that she was presented with the option of recanting her story in front of the band or withdrawing from all band activities. *Id.* Sowers stated that the band was assembled and she was called before it for this purpose, but fled from the room in tears. *Id.*

As the district court noted, it could be inferred that "the 'forced apology' served as a trump card in the hands of Edward Wright," who could threaten his other victims with similar treatment if they reported his actions, *id.* at 1101-02, and Stoneking in fact testified that she did not report Wright's assaults because "I knew about Judy Grove and what happened." Supp. App. at 16.

Smith's handwritten notes refer to three other incidents in 1981-1982 with respect to sexual harassment by DeMarte, the social studies teacher. In 1981, Lori Tsepelis complained to Miller and Smith that DeMarte had kissed her on the back of the neck several times while she was taking a make-up test. See Transcript of Deposition of Smith at 70-83. Ms. Tsepelis' parents also complained. *Id.* at 84-85. DeMarte admitted one kiss, explaining "that he had kissed her on the cheek as a thank you for her having brought food to him at the radio station on two occasions in November." *Id.* at 74. Smith conceded that when a teacher kisses a student it is generally a sexual advance, *id.* at 91, but Smith and Miller merely arranged that Ms. Tsepelis would, for the remainder of the semester, pick up her homework from DeMarte via Miller and that she would not be scheduled for DeMarte's class in the future. Although Smith told DeMarte "he had not used good judgment in having [Ms. Tsepelis] alone in the room," *id.* at 93, he placed no discipline report in DeMarte's file.

Two months later, two female students reported to Miller that another student, Lorie Lamberson, was crying in the restroom and when she emerged she told Smith and Miller that she had gone to DeMarte's room with a friend to get a make-up assignment, that he sent her friend away, blindfolded her to demonstrate the sense of touch, and after doing so was down on his hands and knees looking up her dress. The student was so distraught that she was sent to the nurse's office and then told to contact her parents. *Id.* at 99-106. When she spoke to her mother, she stated "'that she had a problem like Lori Tsepelis.'" *Id.* at 110. Although Smith testified that he subjectively believed Ms. Tsepelis' story, his own notes state that "'before sending [Ms. Lamberson] home I brought up the fact that she and her mother were aware of the incident with Mr. DeMarte and Lori Tsepelis prior to today and hoped that she wasn't involved in *framing* Mr. DeMarte.'" *Id.* at 112 (emphasis added). DeMarte admitted the incident except for the complaint that he had looked up Ms. Lamberson's dress. Nonetheless, Smith's notes continue, "'I also pointed out that it was her word against [DeMarte's] and that Mr. Miller and I would have to judge from that.'" *Id.* at 115. Again, the only action taken was to arrange that the student be scheduled for a different class, *id.* at 119, and no reprimand or other note was placed in DeMarte's file.

The next year, another parent called to complain about DeMarte's relationship with a student because DeMarte had asked the student to sit on his lap at a Halloween party on a social occasion, *see id.* at 151-53, and again no written warning was placed in DeMarte's file. *Id.* at 160.

In sum, there is evidence in the record that between 1978 and 1982 Smith and Miller received at least five complaints about sexual assaults of female

students by teachers and staff members; that Shuey was told about some of these complaints; that Smith recorded these and other allegations in a secret file at home rather than in the teachers' personnel files, which a jury could view as active concealment; that the defendants gave such teachers excellent performance evaluations, which a jury could view as communication by the defendants to the teachers that the conduct of which they were accused would not be considered to reflect negatively on them; and that Smith and Miller discouraged and/or intimidated students and parents from pursuing complaints, on one occasion by forcing a student to publicly recant her allegation.

For this purpose, the fact that Stoneking did not complain to the defendants about Wright's molestation of her is not dispositive. See *Ryan v. Burlington County*, 860 F.2d at 1206-07 (prison officials not entitled to qualified immunity because, under the "reasonable official" standard, they should have known their actions were unconstitutional based on their general knowledge of the overcrowded prison conditions). Although Stoneking's failure to complain may be relevant at trial to her credibility or the causation issue, see *id.* at 1209, for qualified immunity purposes it is sufficient that there is adequate evidence that defendants were on notice of complaints of sexual harassment of students by teachers and staff at the school.

In their brief, defendants correctly state that "[i]n determining whether or not a public official is entitled to a defense of qualified immunity, one must identify legal principles governing analogous factual situations at the time the alleged constitutional violation occurred, and if any existed, determine whether the public officials should have related this established

law to the situation before them." Appellants' Supp. Brief at 26.

After *Monell* had established that government officials could be held liable for policies and practices which they established and maintained, this court held in two cases in 1981 that public officials in administrative positions with notice of assaultive behavior by their subordinates must not take actions which communicate that they encourage or even condone such behavior.

In *Commonwealth v. Porter*, 659 F.2d 306, 309 (3d Cir. 1981) (in banc), *cert. denied*, 458 U.S. 1121 (1982), we considered the appeal of a chief of police and mayor who had been found liable by the district court for "engag[ing] in an extended pattern or practice of conduct denying persons lawfully in [the borough] their constitutional rights to be free from physical violence, mistreatment, threats, harassment . . . ." The physical violence had been inflicted by only one officer in the department, not by these two defendants. Instead, the charges against the police chief, much like those Stoneking raises against the defendants here, were that he received complaints about the conduct of the officer but took no steps to suspend, transfer or otherwise limit the officer's activities; publicly condoned the actions of the officer; and attempted to intimidate persons who complained about his conduct. *Id.* at 310. Similarly, the charges against the mayor stemmed from the fact that he received numerous complaints; carried out only perfunctory investigations, consisting merely "'of asking [the chief and the officer] whether there was any basis for the complaint'"; defended the officer publicly; and retaliated against officers who complained. *Id.* at 311 (quoting *Commonwealth v. Porter*, 480 F. Supp. 686, 702 (W.D. Pa. 1979)).

In the opinion of the majority affirming the district court's findings that the pattern of support shown by the police chief and mayor for the offending policeman amounted "'to a custom and usage under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and *Monell*,'" *id.* at 312 (quoting *Commonweath v. Porter*, 480 F. Supp. 686, 703 (W.D. Pa. 1979)), for which they could be held liable, we stated that *Rizzo v. Goode*, 423 U.S. 362 (1976), "requires that we focus on the degree to which [the] Chief . . . participated in a pattern of violation by virtue of knowledge, acquiescence, support and encouragement." 659 F.2d at 321. A different majority found no basis for liability as to the Borough Council because the evidence as to it consisted primarily of failure to investigate complaints and passage of resolutions supporting the policemen, which was insufficient to establish a pattern or plan. "[N]o more than inaction and insensitivity" had been shown, which did not establish the requisite causal link under *Rizzo v. Goode*. *Id.* at 336-37.

*Porter* demonstrates clearly that by 1981 an administrator's policy of curtailing investigation of complaints brought to the administrator's attention, intimidation of complainants, and/or defense of subordinates charged with misconduct was sufficient to constitute a custom or practice under *Monell*.

Again in 1981, we held that a jury was entitled to hold a city and its chief of police liable for adopting a policy which postponed disciplinary investigation of an officer against whom a complaint was lodged until after resolution of any arrest charge stemming from the incident. *Black v. Stephens*, 662 F.2d 181 (3d Cir. 1981), *cert. denied*, 455 U.S. 1008 (1982). We found that this policy could be construed to encourage officers to bring charges against citizens who accused the police of misconduct, and that proximate causation could be established on this basis. We also

held that the chief of police could be held liable for the promulgation and implementation of a policy which "encouraged the use of excessive force by the officers within the department." *Id.* at 183, 189-91.

Our holdings were consistent with those reached earlier by other courts of appeals. *See, e.g., McClelland v. Facticeau*, 610 F.2d 693, 697-98 (10th Cir. 1979) (police chiefs may be held liable for failure to correct misconduct of which they have notice); *Sims v. Adams*, 537 F.2d 829, 832 (5th Cir. 1976) (complaint stated cause of action against mayor and chief of police for failure to control police officer's propensity for violence); *Turpin v. Maillet*, 579 F.2d 152, 167-68 (2d Cir. 1978) (en banc) (city could be liable under the Fourteenth Amendment for encouraging animosity among police officers against plaintiff which led them to believe that they could violate his civil rights with impunity), *vacated in light of Monell*, 439 U.S. 974 (1978), *reinstated*, 591 F.2d 426 (2d Cir. 1979) (per curiam) (case reinstated on same theory but under § 1983 in light of *Monell*); *judgment for plaintiff reversed, Turpin v. Maillet*, 619 F.2d 196, 202 (2d Cir.) (plaintiff failed to prove official policy where "there was no evidence of a prior pattern or practice of harassment"), *cert. denied*, 449 U.S. 1016 (1980).

In sum, although the mere failure of supervisory officials to act or investigate cannot be the basis of liability, *see Chinchello v. Fenton*, 805 F.2d 126, 133-34 (3d Cir. 1986), by at least 1981 when this court's cases in *Porter* and *Black* were decided (both incidentally arising, as this case does, in the Western District of Pennsylvania), it was clearly established law that such officials may not with impunity maintain a custom, practice or usage that communicated condonation or authorization of assaultive behavior.

If the testimony of the various complainants is believed, Smith and Miller discouraged and minimized reports of sexual misconduct by teachers. A jury could construe such actions, as plaintiff's expert did, as "encourag[ing] a climate to flourish where innocent girls were victimized." Affidavit of Chet Kent, App. at 55. Judge Stapleton in his dissent argues that under the law as it existed at the relevant time, "qualified immunity could be denied only if the circumstances were such that a reasonable school administrator would have realized he was communicating his approval to the offending teacher." Typescript dissenting op. at 3. Although that may seem a farfetched possibility, there is enough in this record from Smith and Miller's suggestion to Ms. Lamberson about "framing" DeMarte and their statement that it was "her word against his," as well as from the forced apology by Judy Grove Sowers about her allegations of Wright's sexual harassment, that a jury could reasonably conclude that such discouragement of complaints amounted to a communication of condonation of the teacher's behavior. Thus, Stoneking has asserted a sufficiently tenable theory that there was an "affirmative link," see *Rizzo v. Goode*, 423 U.S. at 371, between her injury and the policies and practices that Smith and Miller employed and affirmative acts they took in furtherance of them to make this a jury issue.

We are cognizant that defendants deny many of these allegations, and assert that they imposed an adequate policy to deal with Stoneking's allegations against Wright by ordering Wright "never to get into a 'one on one' situation with female students again." Appellants' Supplemental Brief at 4. Whether there was an adequate policy and whether their other defenses have merit will be up to the jury.

On the other hand, we must conclude, in light of our precedent, that Stoneking's claims against Shuey amount to mere "inaction and insensitivity" on his part. *See Porter*, 659 F.2d at 337. We cannot discern from the record any affirmative acts by Shuey on which Stoneking can base a claim of toleration, condonation or encouragement of sexual harassment by teachers which occurred in one of the various schools within his district.

For the foregoing reasons, we conclude that the district court did not err in denying the motion for summary judgment of defendants Smith and Miller on grounds of qualified immunity, but we conclude that Shuey's motion should have been granted.

#### V.

As we have alluded to previously, trial of this case has been pending in the district court for a substantial period of time while the qualified immunity issue has been litigated. Our conclusion that Smith and Miller are not entitled to qualified immunity as a matter of law in their individual capacities is not in any way suggestive of any view on the merits of Stoneking's claim against them personally or against all of the defendants in their official capacities as to which no qualified immunity can be asserted. Thus, we are hopeful that upon remand this case can proceed to an expeditious conclusion.

For the reasons set forth above, we will affirm the district court's denial of the motion for summary judgment as to Smith and Miller on the grounds of qualified immunity, and we will vacate the district court's order denying the motion for qualified immunity as to Shuey in his individual capacity, and remand with directions that his motion be granted.

Costs on appeal are to be borne by appellants Smith and Miller.

STAPLETON, *Circuit Judge*, Concurring in part and Dissenting in part: -

After *DeShaney*, Ms. Stoneking's contention that the defendants owed her a well-established constitutionally based duty to protect her from Mr. Wright is no longer tenable. I agree with the court, however, that she alleges an alternative and distinct theory of liability that is not rejected in *DeShaney*. The issue for decision is whether the defendants have qualified immunity with respect to any damage liability that might be imposed upon them individually on that theory. The court concludes that Superintendent Shuey is entitled to immunity and I agree. I dissent, however, from the court's denial of immunity to Principal Smith and Assistant Principal Miller. Under *Anderson v. Creighton*, 483 U.S. 635 (1987) and *Harlow v. Fitzgerald*, 457 U.S. 800 (1982) cases, the relevant issue is whether reasonable school officials with the knowledge allegedly possessed by the defendants would have realized during the period from 1980 to 1983 that they were violating a well-established duty that they owed to Ms. Stoneking under federal statutory or constitutional law. That issue must be resolved by looking to the pre-1983 case law dealing with the circumstances under which a supervisor can be held liable for the constitutional tort of someone he or she supervises. As I read that case law<sup>1</sup>, the only well-established duty imposed upon a supervisor by federal law was the duty to refrain from affirmative encouragement of the offending conduct. Accordingly, unless the complaint alleges such

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1. The state of the law after *City of Canton v. Harris*, 109 S.Ct. 1197, (1989), is simply not relevant to the issue presented by this appeal.

encouragement and unless Ms. Stoneking, after the filing of the motion for summary judgment, pointed to competent evidence from which a fact finder could find such encouragement, the defendants are entitled to immunity.

In *Commonwealth of Penn. v. Porter*, 659 F.2d 306 (3d Cir. 1981), this court, ruling on Police Chief Porter's liability, held that "encouragement" was a prerequisite to liability. We there stated that *Rizzo v. Goode*, 423 U.S. 362 (1976), "require[d] that we focus on the degree to which Chief Porter participated in a pattern of violation by virtue of knowledge, acquiescence, support and encouragement." 659 F.2d at 321 (emphasis added). We then cited the Chief's "active[] support" of the constitutional tortfeasor, and the "affirmative steps" he took to impede legal action against the subordinate. *Id.* at 322. As to the Mayor, the *Porter* court found that he had been "affirmatively involve[d]" with the constitutional tortfeasor and "strongly support[ed]" him. *Id.*

*Porter's* conclusions on this matter were reiterated in *Black v. Stephens*, 662 F.2d 181, 191 (3d Cir. 1981). In *Black*, this court stated that the evidence supported the jury's finding "of the encouragement and support *required* to hold the [police chief] liable under section 1983." (emphasis added). Finally, in *Chinchello v. Fenton*, 805 F.2d 126 (3d Cir. 1986), we first acknowledged that a plaintiff might have an easier time proving supervisory liability in other circuits than in ours. We then reviewed *Rizzo v. Goode*, 423 U.S. 362, 96 S.Ct. 598 (1976) and its progeny and concluded that supervisory liability could be found only where the official had both "contemporaneous knowledge of the offending incident or knowledge of a prior pattern of similar incidents" and where there were "circumstances

under which the supervisor's inaction could be found to have *communicated a message of approval to the offending subordinate.*" 805 F.2d at 133 (emphasis added).

Under these cases, I am unable to say that a reasonable school administrator would understand that he would violate the well-established constitutional rights of students by failing to pursue a complaint of sexual abuse by a teacher with sufficient aggressiveness or even by discouraging such complaints. Under the law as it then existed, qualified immunity could be denied only if the circumstances were such that a reasonable school administrator would have realized he was communicating his approval to the offending teacher.

I acknowledge that in some contexts failures to discipline teachers shown to have misbehaved and discouragement of complaints about misbehaving teachers might conceivably be a part of a pattern of conduct that would communicate approval by the administration. However, where the misconduct at issue is sexual abuse of high school students and where the administrator has expressly instructed the offending teacher never again to be alone with a female student, it would take a lot more than this record contains to permit a fact finder to conclude that Wright understood the administration to favor his misdeeds.

Because Ms. Stoneking has neither alleged nor shown evidence of affirmative encouragement of Wright's conduct by the individual defendants, I would hold that all three are entitled to immunity.

A True Copy:

Teste:

*Clerk of the United States Court of Appeals  
for the Third Circuit*

**B. Order Sur Petition for Rehearing, U.S.  
Court of Appeals for Third Circuit, No.  
87-3637, September 12, 1989**

*Stoneking v. Bradford Area School District, et al.*



UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE THIRD CIRCUIT

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No. 87-3637

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**KATHLEEN STONEKING**

*Appellee*

v.

**BRADFORD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT et al.,**

*Appellants*

**SUR PETITION FOR REHEARING**

Present: GIBBONS, Chief Judge, HIGGINBOTHAM,  
SLOVITER, BECKER, STAPLETON, MANSMANN,  
GREENBERG, HUTCHINSON, SCIRICA, COWEN,  
and NYGAARD, Circuit Judges.

The petition for rehearing filed by Appellants, Bradford Area School District et al., in the above-entitled case having been submitted to the judges who participated in the decision of this court and to all the other available circuit judges of the circuit in regular active service, and no judge who concurred in the decision having asked for rehearing, and a majority of the circuit judges of the circuit in regular active service not having voted for rehearing by the court in banc, the petition for rehearing is denied. Judges Stapleton, Greenberg and Hutchinson would have

granted the petition for rehearing.

BY THE COURT,

/s/ Dolores K. Sloviter  
Circuit Judge

September 12, 1989

C. Complaint, *Stoneking v. Bradford Area  
School District, et al.*, No. 87-63 E,  
June 23, 1987



**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

**KATHLEEN STONEKING,**  
*Plaintiff*

vs.

Civil Action No. 87-63E

**BRADFORD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT,**  
**FREDERICK SMITH,** in his  
individual and official capacity  
as principal of the Bradford Area  
High School; **RICHARD MILLER,** in  
his individual and official  
capacity as assistant principal  
of the Bradford Area High School  
and **FREDERICK SHUEY,** in his  
individual and official capacity  
as Superintendent of the Bradford  
Area School District,  
*Defendants*

**COMPLAINT**

Parties and Jurisdiction

1. The Plaintiff, Kathleen Stoneking (hereinafter Plaintiff), is a citizen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and resides in Indiana, Pennsylvania.

2. The Defendant, Bradford Area School District, (hereinafter the School District), is a citizen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, is a local governmental agency organized pursuant to the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with its principal offices located at 50 Congress Street, Bradford, Pennsylvania.

3. The Defendant, Frederick Smith (hereinafter Smith), is a citizen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania residing in Bradford, Pennsylvania who is and was at all material times the Principal of the Bradford Area High School.

4. The Defendant, Richard Miller (hereinafter Miller) is a citizen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, residing in Bradford, Pennsylvania, who was at all material times the Assistant Principal of the Bradford Area High School.

5. The Defendant, Frederick Shuey (hereinafter Shuey), is a citizen of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, residing in Bradford, Pennsylvania, was at all material times the Superintendent of the School District.

6. This action arises under Title 42 of the United States Code, Section 1983 and this Court has jurisdiction

of this action pursuant to Title 28 of the United States Code, Sections 1331 and 1343.

### FACTS

7. In 1976 the School District hired Edward Wright (hereinafter Wright) to serve as Band Director.

8. In his capacity as Band Director, Wright was vested with broad responsibility for conducting and managing the band and music programs of the School District including the selection of student participants, and scheduling and conducting of band competitions and periodic music rehearsals throughout the school year.

9. At all material times, Wright conducted the aforesaid activities with the knowledge, consent and approval of the Defendants.

10. During Wright's tenure as Band Director, the School District's music program greatly improved and the Bradford Area High School Band won numerous competitions as a result of which Wright enjoyed the strong support and backing of the School District and its officials.

11. In 1979, a female member of the Bradford Area High School Band informed Defendant Smith, in his capacity as Principal, that Wright had attempted to rape and/or sexually assault her.

12. The Defendant Smith failed to conduct an investigation into the allegations or report the same to appropriate authorities and required the female student to issue a public apology to Wright and retract her allegations in front of the assembled Bradford Area High School Band.

13. It is believed and therefore averred that subsequent to 1979 and thereafter, the Defendant Smith, in his capacity as Principal of Bradford Area High School began to maintain a personal file on Wright which contained, inter alia, reports of complaints and/or allegations concerning sexual misconduct, abuse, and/or harassment by Wright of female students participating in the band program.

14. After that time Smith, in his capacity as Principal, met with Wright and instructed him that he was to have no further "one on one" contact with female band members.

15. It is believed and therefore averred that said policy of Smith relative to Wright's contact with female students was reduced to writing and placed in Wright's file maintained by Smith and described more fully above.

16. Despite the institution of the aforesaid policy concerning Wright and complaints received concerning Wright prior thereto, Smith, Miller and Shuey failed to take any action to protect the health, safety and welfare of the female student body in general and the Plaintiff in par-

ticular such as further investigation, suspension or discipline of Wright, monitoring of Wright's activities, or the reporting of said allegations to appropriate officials for further investigation.

17. It is believed and therefore averred that Defendant Smith had actual notice of the conduct of Wright or, in the alternative, should have known but for the inherently defective and deficient policies and customs promulgated, developed and encouraged by Smith discussed more fully below.

18. During this time Miller, in his capacity as Assistant Principal, was on actual notice of the various allegations and complaints concerning sexual misconduct by Wright since 1979 described more fully above and in particular was on actual notice of the policy adopted by Defendant Smith whereby Smith informed Wright he was to have no further "one on one" contact with female band members.

19. It is believed and therefore averred that Defendant Shuey, in his capacity as Superintendent of the School District, was on actual notice of the various allegations and complaints concerning sexual misconduct by Wright since 1979 described more fully above and, in particular, was on actual notice of the policy adopted by Defendant Smith whereby Smith informed Wright he was to have no further "one on one" contact with female band members.

20. In the alternative, in the event that Defendant Shuey was not on actual notice of the aforesaid allegations and complaints concerning Wright since 1979, his failure to be so informed was the result of inherently defective and deficient policies and customs of the School District which were promulgated, developed and encouraged by Defendant Shuey.

21. The Plaintiff participated in the Bradford Area High School Band during her sophomore, junior and senior years and graduated in 1983, although remaining closely involved with the band.

22. In or about October of 1980 and continuing thereafter periodically until May of 1985, Wright did through physical force, threats of reprisal, intimidation and coercion sexually abuse and harass the Plaintiff and force her to engage in various sexual acts with him.

23. The periodic sexual abuse of the Plaintiff by Wright occurred at various places including the Bradford Area High School band room and its environs, Wright's vehicle, Wright's house and on trips and band functions.

24. Wright's modus operandi which he employed with the Plaintiff and it is believed and therefore averred with various other female members of the Bradford Area High School Band was to threaten the loss of parental support, the esteem of friends, and the dissolution of the

Bradford Area High School Band which had become such a significant institution of the School District and the community in general if his actions were reported.

25. In early March of 1986, a clinical psychologist in State College, Pennsylvania contacted the Bradford Police Department and Defendants Shuey and Smith as a result of a complaint of sexual abuse involving a female band member reported to the psychologist by the student's parents.

26. On March 14, 1986, Wright's resignation was unanimously accepted by the Bradford Area School Directors and he was charged by the police with numerous criminal offenses, all sexual in nature.

27. It was at this point in time, to-wit, in or about March, 1986, the Plaintiff first became aware of the facts establishing the complicity of Defendants Smith, Shuey and Miller and therefore Defendant School District, in allowing the aforesaid sexual molestation to continue.

## COUNT I.

### Kathleen Stoneking vs. Frederick Smith

28. Paragraphs 1 through 27 are incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth.

29. At all material times, a special custodial relationship existed between the Plaintiff and the Defendant Smith.

30. The Plaintiff has been deprived by Defendant Smith, while acting under color of state law, of her rights, privileges and immunities secured by the Constitution or Laws of the United States, specifically her liberty interest to be free in her person from threats, intimidation and sexual abuse such as that perpetrated by Wright.

31. The acts and omissions of Defendant Smith represent conduct which was intentional, willful, outrageous, reckless and deliberately indifferent to the health, safety and welfare of the female student body of the Bradford Area High School in general and Plaintiff in particular.

32. Said acts and omissions included:

(A) Failing to report pursuant to the requirements of the Child Protective Services Law, 11 P.S. Section 2201, et seq., the various incidents of suspected sexual

abuse of female band members by Wright of which Defendant Smith had been on actual notice since 1979;

(B) Failing to adopt an effective policy or policies to facilitate the discovery of sexual abuse of female students and the prompt reporting thereof to appropriate authorities;

(C) Failing to properly and vigorously investigate various reports of sexual abuse of female band members by Wright;

(D) Concealing from the parents of the female band members of the Bradford Area High School and various other public officials including the police department, the various complaints and accusations which had been made against Wright since 1979 and, in particular, in failing to disclose to the appropriate officials the contents of the private file which Defendant Smith kept on Wright relative to said complaints;

(E) Continuing to permit Wright to function as Band Director despite the fact that Smith was on actual notice that Wright posed a significant threat to female band members and would have the occasion and opportunity by virtue of his position as Band Director to sexually abuse them;

(F) Encouraging and perpetuating the development of a custom or course of conduct at the Bradford

Area High School whereby allegations of sexual abuse or mistreatment by Wright and other teachers were not investigated and reported.

33. As a proximate result of the aforesaid acts and omissions of Defendant Smith, the Plaintiff was subjected to sexual abuse, harassment, threats and intimidation by Wright and has suffered and will continue to suffer in the future from the effects of severe psychological trauma including severe depression, loss of self esteem, mental anguish, embarrassment and humiliation.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff, Kathleen Stoneking, requests compensatory damages against Defendant, Frederick Smith, in an amount in excess of \$10,000.00 plus punitive damages, costs of suit and attorney's fees pursuant to Title 40 U.S.C. Section 1988.

## COUNT II

### Kathleen Stoneking v. Frederick Smith

34. The averments of paragraphs 1 through 33 are incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth.

35. The acts and omissions of the Defendant Smith represent malicious and willful misconduct within the meaning of 42 C.S.A. Section 8550.

36. As a proximate result of the aforesaid acts and omissions of Defendant Smith, the Plaintiff was subjected to sexual abuse, harassment, threats and intimidation by Wright and has suffered and will continue to suffer in the future from severe psychological trauma including severe depression, loss of self esteem, mental anguish, embarrassment, humiliation and headaches.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff, Kathleen Stoneking, requests compensatory damages against the Defendant, Frederick Smith, in an amount in excess of \$10,000.00 plus punitive damages, costs and suit and such other relief as the Court may deem appropriate.

### COUNT III.

#### Kathleen Stoneking vs. Richard Miller

37. Paragraphs 1 through 36 are incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth.

38. At all material times, a special custodial relationship existed between the Plaintiff and the Defendant Miller.

39. The Plaintiff has been deprived by Defendant Miller, while acting under color of state law, of her rights, privileges and immunities secured by the Constitution or Laws of the United States, specifically her liberty

interest to be free in her person from threats, intimidation and sexual abuse such as that perpetrated by Wright.

40. The acts and omissions of Defendant Miller represent conduct which was intentional, willful, outrageous, reckless and deliberately indifferent to the health, safety and welfare of the female student body of the Bradford Area High School in general and the Plaintiff in particular.

41. Said acts and omissions included:

(A) Failing to report pursuant to the requirements of the Child Protective Services Law, 11 P.S. Section 2201, et seq., the various incidents of suspected sexual abuse of female band members by Wright of which Defendant Miller had been on actual notice since 1979;

(B) Failing to adopt an effective policy or policies to facilitate the discovery of sexual abuse of female students and the prompt reporting thereof to appropriate authorities;

(C) Failing to properly and vigorously investigate various reports of sexual abuse of female band members by Wright;

(D) Concealing from the parents of the female band members of the Bradford Area High School and various other officials including the police department the

various complaints and accusations which had been made against Wright since 1979 and, in particular, in failing to disclose to the appropriate officials the contents of the private file which Defendant Smith kept on Wright relative to said complaints;

(E) Continuing to permit Wright to function as Band Director despite the fact that Miller was on actual notice that Wright posed a significant threat to female band members and would have the occasion and opportunity by virtue of his position as Band Director to sexually abuse them;

(F) Encouraging and perpetuating the development of a custom or course of conduct at the Bradford Area High School whereby allegations of sexual abuse or mistreatment by Wright were not vigorously investigated and reported.<sup>2</sup>

42. As a proximate result of the aforesaid acts and omissions of Defendant Miller, the Plaintiff was subjected to sexual abuse, harassment, threats and intimidation by Wright and has suffered and will continue to suffer in the future from the effects of severe psychological trauma including severe depression, loss of self esteem, mental anguish, embarrassment and humiliation.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff, Kathleen Stoneking, requests compensatory damages against the Defendant, Frederick Miller, in an amount in excess of

\$10,000.00 plus punitive damages, costs of suit and attorney's fees pursuant to Title 42. U.S.C. Section 1988.

#### COUNT IV.

##### Kathleen Stoneking vs. Richard Miller

43. The averments of paragraphs 1 through 42 are incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth.

44. The acts and omissions of the Defendant Miller represent malicious and willful misconduct within the meaning of 42 Pa. C.S.A. Section 8550.

45. As a proximate result of the aforesaid acts and omissions of Defendant Miller, the Plaintiff was subjected to sexual abuse, harassment, threats and intimidation by Wright and has suffered and will continue to suffer in the future from the effects of severe psychological trauma including severe depression, loss of self esteem, mental anguish, embarrassment and humiliation.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff, Kathleen Stoneking, requests compensatory damages against the Defendant, Richard Miller, in an amount in excess of \$10,000.00 plus punitive damages, costs or suit and such other relief as the Court may deem appropriate.

## COUNT V.

### Kathleen Stoneking v. Frederick Shuey

46. The averments of paragraphs 1 through 45 are incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth.

47. At all material times, a special custodial relationship existed between the Plaintiff and the Defendant, Shuey, as Superintendent of the School District.

48. The Plaintiff has been deprived by Defendant Shuey, while acting under color of state law, of her rights privileged and immunities secured by the Constitution or Laws of the United States, specifically her liberty interest to be free in her person from threats, intimidation and sexual abuse such as that perpetrated by Wright.

49. The acts and omissions of Defendant Shuey represent conduct which was intentional, willful, outrageous, reckless and deliberately indifferent to the health, safety and welfare of the female student body of the Bradford Area High School in general and the Plaintiff in particular.

50. Said acts and omissions included:

(A) Failing to report pursuant to the requirements of the Child Protective Service Law, 11 P.S. Section 2201, et seq., the various incidents of suspected sexual

abuse of female band members by Wright of which Defendant Shuey had been on actual notice since 1979;

(B) Failing to adopt an effective policy or policies to facilitate the discovery of sexual abuse of female students and the prompt reporting thereof to appropriate authorities;

(C) Failing to properly and vigorously investigate various reports of sexual abuse of female band members by Wright;

(D) Concealing from the parents of the female band members of the Bradford Area High School and various other officials including the police department the various complaints and accusations which had been made against Wright since 1979 and, in particular, in failing to disclose to the appropriate officials the contents of the private file which Defendant Smith kept on Wright relative to said complaints;

(E) Continuing to permit Wright to function as Band Director despite the fact that Miller was on actual notice that Wright posed a significant threat to female band members and would have the occasion and opportunity by virtue of his position as Band Director to sexually abuse them;

(F) Encouraging and perpetuating the development of a custom or course of conduct at the Bradford

Area High School whereby allegations of sexual abuse or mistreatment by Wright were not vigorously investigated and reported.

51. In the alternative, in the event that Defendant Shuey did not have actual notice of the complaints and allegations concerning sexual abuse of female band members by Wright since 1979, the failure to have acquired such information was the result of inherently defective and deficient policies promulgated by Defendant Shuey or a course of conduct or custom perpetuated and encouraged by him which frustrated the efficient reporting of suspected child abuse and prompt investigation of the same.

52. As a proximate result of the aforesaid acts and omissions of Defendant Shuey, the Plaintiff was subjected to sexual abuse, harassment, threats and intimidation by Wright and has suffered and will continue to suffer in the future from the effects of severe psychological trauma including severe depression, loss of self esteem, mental anguish, embarrassment and humiliation.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff, Kathleen Stoneking, requests compensatory damages against the Defendant Frederick Shuey, in an amount in excess of \$10,000.00 plus punitive damages, costs of suit and attorney's fees pursuant to Title 42 U.S.C. Section 1988.

## COUNT VI.

### Kathleen Stoneking vs. Frederick Shuey

53. The averments of paragraphs 1 through 52 are incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth.

54. The acts and omissions of the Defendant Shuey represent malicious and willful misconduct within the meaning of 42 C.S.A. Section 8550.

55. As a proximate result of the aforesaid acts and omissions of Defendant Shuey, the Plaintiff was subjected to sexual abuse, harassment, threats and intimidation by Wright and has suffered and will continue to suffer in the future from the effects of severe psychological trauma including severe depression, loss of self esteem, mental anguish, embarrassment, humiliation, headaches and stomach disorders.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff, Kathleen Stoneking, requests compensatory damages against the Defendant, Frederick Shuey, in an amount in excess of \$10,000.00 plus punitive damages, costs of suit and such other relief as the Court may deem appropriate.

## **COUNT VII.**

### **Kathleen Stoneking vs. Bradford Area School District**

56. The averments of paragraphs 1 through 55 are incorporated herein by reference as if fully set forth.

57. The Defendant School District is directly liable to the Plaintiff by virtue of the aforesaid acts and omissions of Defendants Smith, Miller and Shuey in their official capacities as Principal, Assistant Principal and Superintendent respectively, and further as a result of the deficient and defective policies and customs promulgated, developed and encourage by said Defendants.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff, Kathleen Stoneking, requests compensatory damages against the Bradford Area School District in an amount in excess of \$10,000.00, plus

punitive damages, costs and suit and attorney's fees pursuant to Title 42 U.S.C. Section 1988.  
JURY TRIAL DEMANDED.

PECORA, DUKE & BABCOX

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
P.O. Box 548  
Bradford, PA 16701  
(814) 362-3896

**D. Answer to Complaint, *Stoneking v.*  
*Bradford Area School District, et al.*,  
No. 87-63, June 23, 1987**



**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

**KATHLEEN STONEKING,**  
*Plaintiff*

vs.

Civil Action No. 87-63E

**BRADFORD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT,**  
**FREDERICK SMITH,** in his  
individual and official capacity  
as principal of the Bradford Area  
High School; **RICHARD MILLER,** in  
his individual and official  
capacity as assistant principal  
of the Bradford Area High School  
and **FREDERICK SHUEY,** in his  
individual and official capacity  
as Superintendent of the Bradford  
Area School District,  
*Defendants*

**ANSWER TO COMPLAINT OF KATHLEEN STONEKING**

Now Come Defendants, by and through their attorneys Murphy, Taylor & Adams, P.C. and James D. McDonald, Jr., Esq., and answer the Complaint of the Plaintiff, Kathleen Stoneking, setting forth as follows:

1. Admitted.

2. Admitted.

3. Admitted.

4. Admitted.

5. Admitted. In further answer, the Defendant Frederick Shuey retired from the said position on or about July 1, 1986.

6. Admitted that Plaintiff is attempting to establish a claim pursuant to the quoted statute; denied that any of the Defendants have violated the said statute. Admitted that this Court has jurisdiction to resolve the instant controversy.

7. Admitted.

8. The allegations of Paragraph 8 are admitted in part and denied in part. It is admitted that Wright was band director and as band director he conducted the Bradford Area High School marching band, stage band and concert band. It is further admitted that Wright's duties as a band director included summer band practice and conducting the Bradford Area High School bands during competitions. In other respects, the allegations of Paragraph 8 are denied.

9. The allegations of Paragraph 9 are admitted in part and denied in part. It is admitted that Wright conducted the activities set forth in Paragraph 8 of this Answer hereinabove with the knowledge, consent and approval of the Defendants. However, the responsibilities of Wright as band director set forth in Paragraph 8 of the Complaint are inaccurate and, therefore, the allegations of Paragraph 9 of the Plaintiff's Complaint referring thereto are denied as stated.

10. The allegations of Paragraph 10 of the Plaintiff's Complaint are admitted in part and denied in part. It is admitted that the marching band was developed during the period of time that Wright was employed by the Defendant Bradford and that the marching band did well in competition. It is specifically denied that the stage and concert bands did well in competition. It is admitted that the bands were supported by the School District and its officials to the same extent as the support provided to all School District activities. In all other respects, the allegations of Paragraph 9 of the Plaintiff's Complaint are denied.

11. The allegations of Paragraph 11 of the Plaintiff's Complaint are specifically denied as stated. It is admitted that Defendant Smith questioned a female member of the Bradford Area High School band regarding a possible relationship between her and Wright. The student denied the relationship and advised Defendant Smith that

she had fabricated the story. In all other respects the allegations of Paragraph 11 are specifically denied.

12. The allegations of Paragraph 12 are specifically denied.

13. The allegations of Paragraph 13 are specifically denied. However, in further answer thereto, it is admitted that Defendant Smith did maintain a miscellaneous file organized chronologically which contained his notions relating to various subject matter expressed and/or raised by various persons over the years.

14. Denied as vague; Defendants are unclear as to what time Plaintiff is referring. In further answer, it is admitted that on or about December 15, 1984, Defendant Smith directed Wright not to place himself in a one-on-one situation at any time in the future with a female student. In other respects, the allegations of Paragraph 14 are denied.

15. In answer to Paragraph 15, it is admitted that the directive from Smith to Wright in 1984 was noted in writing on records maintained by Smith which records were placed in the miscellaneous file maintained by Smith. In other respects, the allegations of Paragraph 15 are denied.

16. The allegations of Paragraph 16 are specifically denied.

17. The allegations of Paragraph 17 are specifically denied.

18. The allegations of Paragraph 18 are specifically denied.

19. The allegations of Paragraph 19 are admitted in part and denied in part. It is admitted that Defendant Shuey was advised in a timely fashion of the activities conducted by Defendant Smith with respect to Wright. In other respects, the allegations of Paragraph 19 are denied.

20. The allegations of Paragraph 20 are specifically denied.

21. It is admitted that the Plaintiff participated in the Bradford Area High School band during her sophomore, junior and senior years and that the Plaintiff graduated in 1983. Defendants are without sufficient knowledge or information to form a belief as to the remaining allegations about her involvement with the band subsequent to graduation, and those allegations are therefore denied, strict proof demanded at trial, if material.

22. Defendants are without sufficient knowledge or information to form a belief as to the allegations of Paragraph 22 of the Plaintiff's Complaint and therefore deny same and demand strict proof thereof at trial, if material. In further answer, Plaintiff never reported any

such incidents to Defendants while she was a student in the high school.

23. In answer to Paragraph 23 of the Plaintiff's Complaint, the Defendants herein are without sufficient knowledge or information to form a belief as to the truth of those allegations and therefore deny same and demand strict proof thereof at trial, if material.

24. In answer to Paragraph 24 of the Plaintiff's Complaint, the Defendants are without sufficient knowledge or information to form a belief as to the truth of said allegations and therefore deny same and demand strict proof thereof at trial, if material.

25. In answer to Paragraph 25 of the Plaintiff's Complaint, it is specifically denied that clinical psychologists contacted Defendants Shuey and Smith. In all other respects, the allegations of Paragraph 25 are denied.

26. In answer to Paragraph 26 of the Plaintiff's Complaint, it is admitted that on March 14, 1987, Wright's resignation was unconditionally accepted by Defendant Bradford.

27. The allegations of Paragraph 27 are specifically denied. It is specifically denied that any Defendant ever allowed any sexual molestation to take place.

28. Paragraphs 1 through 27 of this Answer hereinabove are incorporated herein by reference.

29. The allegations of Paragraph 29 are admitted in part. It is admitted that Defendant Smith, as principal, maintained a principal/student relationship with the students in the school system; denied that this is recognized legally as a "special custodial relationship." In other respects, the allegations of Paragraph 29 of the Plaintiff's Complaint are denied.

30. The allegations of Paragraph 30 are specifically denied.

31. The allegations of Paragraph 31 are specifically denied.

32. The allegations of Paragraph 32 of the Plaintiff's Complaint, specifically including all subparts thereof, are specifically denied.

33. The allegations of Paragraph 33 are specifically denied.

34. Paragraphs 1 through 33 of this Answer set forth hereinabove are incorporated herein by reference.

35. The allegations of Paragraph 35 are specifically denied.

36. The allegations of Paragraph 36 are specifically denied.

37. Paragraphs 1 through 36 of this Answer hereinabove are incorporated herein by reference.

38. The allegations of Paragraph 38 are admitted in part and denied in part. It is admitted that Defendant Miller maintained an assistant principal/student relationship between himself and the students of the Defendant School District; denied that this is a recognized legally as a "special custodial relationship." However, in all other respects, the allegations of Paragraph 38 of the Plaintiff's Complaint are specifically denied.

39. The allegations of Paragraph 39 are specifically denied.

40. The allegations of Paragraph 40 are specifically denied.

41. The allegations of Paragraph 41 of the Plaintiff's Complaint, specifically including all subparts thereof, are specifically denied.

42. The allegations of Paragraph 42 are specifically denied.

43. Paragraphs 1 through 42 of this Answer hereinabove are incorporated herein by reference.

44. The allegations of Paragraph 44 are specifically denied.

45. The allegations of Paragraph 45 are specifically denied.

46. Paragraphs 1 through 45 of this Answer hereinabove are incorporated herein by reference.

47. The allegations of Paragraph 47 are admitted in part and denied in part. It is admitted that Defendant Shuey maintained a superintendent/student relationship between himself and the students of the Defendant School District; denied that this is recognized legally as a "special custodial relationship." However, in all other respects, the allegations of Paragraph 47 of the Plaintiff's Complaint are specifically denied.

48. The allegations of Paragraph 48 are specifically denied.

49. The allegations of Paragraph 49 are specifically denied.

50. The allegations of Paragraph 50 of the Plaintiff's Complaint, specifically including all subparts thereof, are specifically denied.

51. The allegations of Paragraph 51 are specifically denied.

52. The allegations of Paragraph 52 are specifically denied.

53. Paragraphs 1 through 52 of this Answer hereinabove are incorporated herein by reference.

54. The allegations of Paragraph 54 are specifically denied.

55. The allegations of Paragraph 55 are specifically denied.

56. Paragraphs 1 through 55 of this Answer hereinabove are incorporated herein by reference.

57. The allegations of Paragraph 57 are specifically denied.

## **SECOND DEFENSE**

58. The claims asserted by the Plaintiff in the within action are barred in whole or in part by the applicable statute of limitations.

### **THIRD DEFENSE**

59. The Plaintiff has failed to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.

### **FOURTH DEFENSE**

60. The Defendant, Bradford Area School District, is not vicariously liable to the Plaintiff under any theory of respondeat superior, since 42 U.S.C. §1983 does not support an action for vicarious liability.

### **FIFTH DEFENSE**

61. The Defendant, Bradford Area School District, is not liable to the Plaintiff for punitive damages, since 42 U.S.C. §1983 does not support an action for punitive damages against a municipal body.

### **SIXTH DEFENSE**

62. All Defendants, acting in their official capacity, reasonably believe that all actions taken by them were appropriate and constitutional in light of all the circumstances, and acted in good faith.

63. All Defendants are therefore immune from suit under 42 U.S.C. §1983.

### **SEVENTH DEFENSE**

64. The Defendant, Bradford Area School District, is immune from suit under the Political Subdivision Tort Claims Act, 42 Pa. C.S.A. §8541.

65. The Defendants, Frederick Shuey and Frederick Smith, are immune from suit under the doctrine of official immunity, pursuant to 42 Pa. C.S.A. §8545.

### **EIGHTH DEFENSE**

66. Plaintiff was contributorily negligent in that she did not report the incidents of which she complained in a timely fashion to the appropriate officials in order to allow them to take appropriate steps.

WHEREFORE, Defendants pray for a judgment in their favor and against Plaintiff, with costs and attorney fees assessed against Plaintiff.

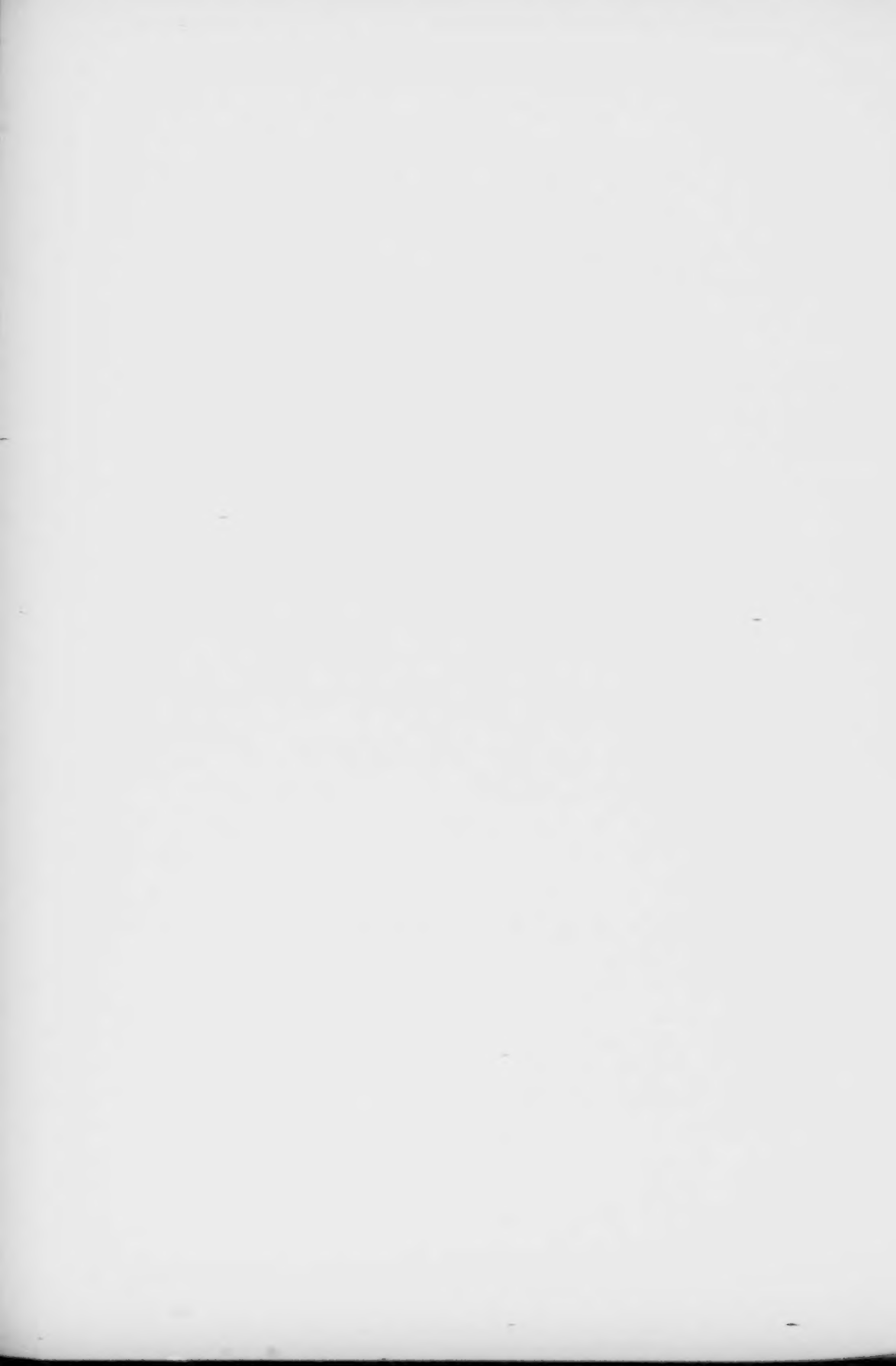
MURPHY, TAYLOR & ADAMS, P.C.

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Kenneth D. Chestek, Esq.  
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McDONALD LAW OFFICES

By: \_\_\_\_\_

James D. McDonald, Jr., Esq.  
456 West 6th Street, Erie, PA  
(814) 456-5318  
Attorneys for Defendants



**E. Opinion and Order, U.S. District for  
Western District of Pennsylvania, No. 87-63  
E., August 28, 1987, reported at 667 F.Supp.  
1088 (1987)**

*Stoneking v. Bradford Area School District, et al.*



**Kathleen Stoneking,**

*Plaintiff*

v.

**Bradford Area School District;**

**Frederick Smith,** in his

individual and official capacity as principal  
of Bradford Area High School; **Richard Miller,**

in his individual and official capacity as  
assistant principal of the Bradford Area High  
School and **Frederick Shuey,** in his individual  
and official capacity as Superintendent of  
the Bradford Area School District, -

*Defendants*

Civil Action No. 87-63 E

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

667 F. Supp. 1088; 1987 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 7950

August 28, 1987

COUNSEL:

Deborah W. Babcox, Esquire, Pecora Duke & Babcox,  
for Plaintiff.

Kenneth D. Chestek, Esquire; James D. McDonald, Jr.,  
Esquire, for Defendants.

## OPINION

MENCER, J.

### I. INTRODUCTION

On March 24, 1987, Kathleen Stoneking filed a civil rights action against Bradford Area School District ("School District"), Frederick Smith, the Principal of the Bradford Area High School, Richard Miller, the Assistant Principal of the Bradford Area High School and Frederick Shuey, the Superintendent of the School District.<sup>1</sup> The gravamen of the complaint is that the defendants violated the constitutional rights of the plaintiff by failing to remedy the situation that existed at the Bradford Area High School. According to the allegations in the complaint, the individual defendants knew or recklessly failed to discover that Edward Wright, the band director at the High School, was sexually assaulting female members of the band. Additionally, it is alleged that the School District had a practice or custom of failing to appropriately respond to

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<sup>1</sup>Pursuant to an order entered May 22, 1987, this case was consolidated for trial with similar actions filed on behalf of Kim Harbaugh and Lisa Rovito. Motions for summary judgment were filed in the Harbaugh and Rovito cases on April 13, 1987. At that time, the parties provided the court with extensive briefs and voluminous deposition testimony. The motions, briefs and deposition transcripts from the Harbaugh and Rovito cases have been adopted for the purposes of the pending summary judgment motion. Reliance on those briefs will simply be noted by reference to the "Companion Case."

complaints by female students of sexual abuse or harassment perpetrated by male teachers.

The defendants have filed a motion for summary judgment. As set forth in their brief, the first ground for the motion is that the plaintiff failed to file her complaint in a timely fashion. The defendants also assert that the plaintiff failed to identify a constitutional right which has been violated. The defendants contend that as a matter of law there is no § 1983 claim because there is no individual liability nor is there any policy, practice or custom which would implicate the School District. In the alternative, it is asserted that defendants Smith, Miller and Shuey are entitled to qualified immunity. Finally, the defendants assert that the complaint fails to set forth state law violations.

After consideration of the briefs, the voluminous deposition testimony and the relevant case law, this Court concludes that: (1) there are genuine issues of material fact pertaining to the statute of limitations; (2) the plaintiff has alleged a violation of a well-established constitutional right; (3) there are genuine issues of material fact pertaining to the liability of defendants Smith, Miller and Shuey; (4) there are genuine issues of material fact regarding the existence of an "official practice or custom;" (5) defendants Smith, Miller and Shuey are not shielded from liability by the defense of qualified immunity and (6) the complaint does fail to set forth state law claims. Therefore, this Court shall deny the motion for summary judgment.

ment filed on behalf of the defendants, as it pertains to Counts I, III, V and VII<sup>2</sup>, and grant the motion as it pertains to Counts II, IV and VI.

## II. FACTUAL BACKGROUND

In August, 1975, Edward Wright was hired by the Bradford Area School District to serve in the capacity of band director. Mr. Wright was responsible for instructing band activities and providing students with music lessons. Under Mr. Wright's direction, the high school band and individual band members were extremely successful in both regional and remote competitions. The band came to be the pride and joy of the school and the community. As the band's acclaim grew, so too did the acclaim of Edward Wright.

Three and a half years into Mr. Wright's tenure, a young woman by the name of Judy Grove<sup>3</sup> came forward and informed Dr. Smith, the School Principal and Mr. Miller, the Assistant Principal, that the band director had sexually assaulted her. At that time, Ms. Grove openly acknowledged that she had been drinking prior to the assault and that the assault had taken place at Mr. Wright's residence.

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<sup>2</sup>The final count in the complaint was mislabeled "Count V." It should, however, be Count VII.

<sup>3</sup>Since graduating from high school Judy has gotten married and her legal name is Judy Grove Sowers. For the purposes of this opinion, however, the Court will use the witness's maiden name.

The details of the events that followed Ms. Grove's disclosure are vigorously contested. All parties agree, however, that Dr. Smith ultimately appeared before the band to quiet the "rumors" and to encourage the band to work together again.

Mr. Wright's sexual abuse and harassment of Kathleen Stoneking began in the fall of 1980. The first incident of abuse consisted of Mr. Wright forcibly kissing Ms. Stoneking. As time progressed, the abuse greatly accelerated both in terms of frequency and in terms of intrusiveness. The sexual abuse continued, on an almost weekly basis, until Ms. Stoneking graduated from high school in the spring of 1983. As reported by the plaintiff, there were isolated incidences of abuse that occurred as late as May, 1985.

In early March, 1986 William Smith, Frederick Smith's son, informed his father that Mr. Wright was sexually assaulting female band members. Almost immediately after this information was conveyed to Dr. Smith, the School District responded. The parents of other students who had been assaulted were contacted. Several meetings followed which were attended by various administration officials, the parents of some of the girls who had been assaulted and the girls themselves. Mr. Wright was suspended as of March 10, 1986 and later resigned from his job. Subse-

quently, Edward Wright pled guilty to a ten count indictment.<sup>4</sup>

### III. STANDARD FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT

In reviewing a motion for summary judgment, the Court is governed by the standard set forth in Fed.R.Civ.P. 56(c). In pertinent part the Rule provides "[t]he judgment sought shall be rendered forthwith if the pleadings, depositions, answers to interrogatories, and admissions on file, together with the affidavits, if any, show that there is no genuine Issue as to any material fact and that the moving part is entitled to judgment as a matter of law."

The application of this standard requires that "[i]nferences to be drawn from the underlying facts contained in the evidential sources submitted to the trial court must be viewed in the light most favorable to the party opposing

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<sup>4</sup>On a number of occasions, the defendants raised the issue of "consent." Accordingly, during the course of the depositions the girls who had been assaulted by Mr. Wright were quizzed on why they failed to "kick, slap, bite, hit, or knee" their teacher, Mr. Wright.

On November 6, 1986, Edward Wright plead guilty to criminal charges, including four counts of indecent assault. One of the elements of indecent assault is *lack of consent*. See 18 Pa. C.S.A. § 3126. By pleading guilty to the criminal charges Mr. Wright admitted that his victims had not consented.

The fact that Kathleen Stoneking choose not to immediately report the criminal acts of Edward Wright is, for the purpose of this proceeding, irrelevant. Cf. *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*, 106 S. Ct. 2399 (1986) (The Court held that "[t]he gravamen of any sexual harassment claim is that the alleged sexual advances were 'unwelcome'" *Id.* at 2406).

the motion." *Baker v. Lukens Steel Co.*, 793 F.2d 509, 511 (3d Cir. 1986), citing, *Goodman v. Mead Johnson & Co.*, 534 F.2d 566, 573 (3d Cir. 1976), *cert. denied*. 429 U.S. 1038 (1977). Therefore, this Court must resolve all doubt, as to the existence of a genuine issue of material fact, in favor of the plaintiff.

#### IV. LEGAL DISCUSSION

##### A. Statute of Limitations

In its recent decision of *Wilson v. Garcia*, 471 U.S. 261 (1985), the Supreme Court declared that all actions brought pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §1983 shall be characterized as personal injury actions and are subject, therefore, to the applicable state statute of limitations. In reaching this conclusion the Court instructed that: "[t]he characterization of § 1983 for statute of limitations purposes is derived from the elements of the cause of action, and Congress' purpose in providing it. These, of course are matters of federal law. . . . [However,] the length of the limitations period, and closely related questions of tolling and application, are to be governed by state law." *Id.* at 268-69. Therefore, for claims arising in Pennsylvania, federal courts must apply the two year statute of limitations set forth in 42 Pa. C.S.A. § 5524 (2). See *Sullivan v. City of Pittsburgh*, 811 F.2d 171, 180 (3d Cir. 1987); *Smith v. City of Pittsburgh*, 764 F.2d 188, 194 (3d Cir.), *cert. denied*, 106 S. Ct. 349 (1985). Additionally, federal courts are bound to apply state tolling rules.

The well-established rule, regarding the tolling of the statute of limitations, is that the statute begins to run when the liability-creating act is committed. See *Bernath v. LeFever*, 325 Pa. 43, 47, 189 A. 342, 344 (1937) ("there is no evidence in the present record. . . which, from whatever angle viewed, would justify a postponement of the operation of the statute beyond the time 'when the injury was done.'"). In order to prevent the harsh results that would occur if that rule were applied in all situations, the courts have created an exception. This exception is known as the discovery rule. See *Lewey v. H. C. Frick Coke Co.*, 166 Pa. 536, 547, 31 A. 261, 263 (1895).

The Pennsylvania Superior Court discussed applicability of the discovery rule in *Anthony v. Koppers Co.*, 284 Pa. Super. 81, 425 A.2d 428 (1980), *rev'd on other grds.* 496 Pa. 119, 436 A.2d 181 (1981). In that case, the court explained that, "the discovery rule is a judicial creation, fashioned to solve a specific problem, namely, whether the law should preclude recovery for an injury that not even a diligent party may reasonably be expected to discover." *Anthony*, 284 Pa. Super. 89, 425 A.2d at 432. The court went on to note that although the exception, as it was first applied involved the concealment of injury, "as the rule has developed it has become clear that its basis is not concealment by the defendant but rather the ability of the plaintiff to discover . . . [her] injury or its cause." *Anthony*, 284 Pa. Super. at 95, 425 A.2d at 436 (emphasis added). Thus, when the discovery rule is applicable the statute of limitations will not start to run until the plaintiff actually discov-

ers the injury and the cause of the injury or reasonably should have discovered such.<sup>5</sup>

The role of the court in evaluating a plaintiff's assertion that the discovery rule should apply is limited.<sup>6</sup> The court must decide whether there is sufficient evidence by which a jury could reasonably decide that the plaintiff did not discover the injury or its cause until after the occurrence of the liability-creating act. Once a court makes that

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<sup>5</sup>Although the Pennsylvania Superior Court modified the discovery rule in *Cathcart v. Keen Industrial Insulation*, 324 Pa. Super. 123, 471 A.2d 493 (1984), that modification does not impact on the instant action. The court in *Cathcart* concluded that "an allegation of mere difficulty in identifying defendants . . . [is] not sufficient to toll the running of the statute of limitations." 324 Pa. Super. at 139, 471 A.2d at 501. Significantly, the court expressly decided not to overrule, *Grubb v. Albert Einstein Medical Center*, 255 Pa. Super. 381, 387 A.2d 480 (1978), an earlier case where the statute of limitations was tolled because the plaintiff had been unable to determine the causal relation between her injuries and the manufacturer of a medical instrument that allegedly caused her injuries. This Court concludes that the factual situation in the instant action is more akin to *Grubb*, than *Cathcart*.

<sup>6</sup>In evaluating an assertion that a claim is time barred, it is essential to keep in mind which party bears the applicable burden. Since the statute of limitations defense is an affirmative one, see Fed. R. Civ. P. 8 (c), the defendant bears the initial burden. If the plaintiff's response to this defense is that the statute of limitations should not run from the time the tortious act was committed, but rather from a later date when the plaintiff discovered the injury and its cause, i.e., if the plaintiff is relying on the discovery rule, then the burden shifts to the plaintiff. *Van Buskirk v. Carey Canadian Mines, Ltd.*, 760 F.2d 481, 487 (3d Cir. 1985). The plaintiff must allege and thereafter prove that she did not have knowledge of her injury or the cause of that injury until some date after the liability creating act occurred. *Id.* Additionally, the plaintiff must prove that she was diligent in her efforts to discover the injury or the cause in a reasonable period of time. *Bickell v. Stein*, 291 Pa. Super. 145, 150, 435 A.2d 610, 612 (1981).

determination the remaining questions are for the jury. As the court in *Burnside v. Abbot Laboratories*, 351 Pa. Super. 264, 292, 505 A.2d 973, 988 (1985), recently pointed out: "[W]here the issue involves a factual determination regarding what is a reasonable period of time for a plaintiff to discover . . . [her] injury and its cause the determination is for the jury." See also *Taylor v. Tukanowicz*, 290 Pa. Super. 581, 586, 435 A.2d 181, 183 (1981).

In the instant action the plaintiff asserts that she did not discover that the individual defendants were the cause of her injuries until the School District took affirmative action to discipline and discharge Edward Wright.<sup>7</sup> Those events occurred in March, 1986. Thus, plaintiff contends that the two year statute of limitations should not run from that date. Defendants, on the other hand, insist that plaintiff was aware of the requisite facts at least by the time she graduated from Bradford Area High School, in June, 1983.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Technically, Mr. Wright was given an option to resign. Although he later exercised that option, it appears as though he had little choice in the matter.

<sup>8</sup>The defendants' opposition to the application of the discovery rule is somewhat tenuous. In order to have the requisite knowledge which would preclude the application of the discovery rule, prior to the running of the limitation period Ms. Stoneking would have had to have *known* that Judy Grove was in fact sexually assaulted by Edward Wright. Ms. Stoneking would have had to have *known* that the defendants received notice of the assault. Additionally, the plaintiff, would have had to have known that the defendants knew that Judy's allegations were true and that in, light of that information they choose to disregard Judy's complaint. Thus, in order to be precluded

In addressing the court's role in determining whether a claim is time barred, the third circuit offered the advice that "[s]ince the applicability of the statute of limitations usually involves question of fact for the jury, defendants bear a heavy burden in seeking to establish as a matter of law that the challenged claims are barred." *Van Buskirk v. Carey Canadian Mines, LTD*, 760 F.2d 481, 498 (3d Cir. 1985). Reviewing the available evidence in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, this Court concludes that the defendants have not satisfied that heavy burden. There are genuine issues of material fact pertaining to the tolling of the statute of limitations. Therefore, the motion for summary judgment, as it pertains to the statute of limitations defense, is denied.

#### B. Evaluation of Section 1983 Claim

##### 1. Identification of constitutional right

In pertinent part 42 U.S.C. § 1983 provides:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom or usage of any State . . . subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the depri-

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from the application of the discovery rule, the plaintiff would have had to have *known* that certain events occurred, events that the defendants vigorously contend never did occur.

vation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity or other proper proceeding for redress.

The crux of any section 1983 action is a violation of a protected constitutional right. Thus, identification of the specific right is "not a mere academic exercise and is necessary in determining whether a cause of action may be maintained under § 1983." *Metcalf v. Long*, 615 F. Supp. 1108, 1113 (D.C. Del. 1985). See also *Fox v. Custis*, 712 F.2d 84, 87 (4th Cir. 1983).

In the complaint, plaintiff alleges that the defendants, acting under color of state law, deprived her of her rights, privileges and immunities as secured by the Constitution. More specifically, the plaintiff alleges that she was deprived of her liberty interest which entitled her to be free from the constant threats, intimidation, sexual abuse and sexual harassment perpetrated by Edward Wright. Although the plaintiff does not expressly link her claim to the substantive due process clause of the fourteenth amendment, identification of the liberty interest serves that purpose. The critical question is whether such a right is cognizable under the fourteenth amendment.

In discussing the breadth of the fourteenth amendment the district court in *Metcalf* pointed out:

Substantive due process is a nebulous term, the meaning of which readily changes depending on the context of the particular situation. Substantive due process derives from the idea that the framers of the Constitution intended to protect rights other than those specified. In deciding that certain rights not specified in the constitution are protected by the due process clause, the Court has looked to those rights which are "so rooted in the traditions and conscience of our people as to be ranked as fundamental."

*Metcalf*, 615 F. Supp. at 1120. A review of the case law will assist in the task of determining whether the rights asserted by the plaintiff are so rooted in tradition and conscience to rise to the ranks of fundamental.

The Supreme Court's decision in *Ingraham v. Wright*, 430 U.S. 651 (1977) is instructive in this area. The issue in *Ingraham* revolved around the use of corporal punishment in public schools. After deciding that the eighth amendment offered the school students no protection, the Court turned its attention to the fourteenth amendment due process clause.

In a summary fashion, the Court concluded that "where school authorities, acting under color of state law, deliberately decide to punish a child for misconduct by restraining the child and inflicting appreciable physical pain, we

hold that Fourteenth Amendment liberty interests are implicated." *Ingraham*, 430 U.S. at 674. Thus, the Supreme Court recognized the existence of a substantive right to be free from bodily abuse.

Admittedly, the liberty interests asserted in the instant action are not identical to those asserted and recognized by the Supreme Court in *Ingraham*. However, common sense suggests that the right to be free from sexual abuse is at least as fundamental as the right to be free from the less intrusive physical abuse of paddling. The Supreme Court's view that corporal punishment implicates a constitutional liberty interest is persuasive evidence that allegations of sexual abuse and sexual harassment would raise to the same level.

*Ingraham* does not stand alone in this area; there are other cases that recognize a similar constitutional right. In *Doe v. New York City Department of Social Services*, 649 F.2d 134 (2d Cir. 1981) (*Doe I*), the issue was whether a state agency could be liable for failing to protect a child from the physical and sexual abuse inflicted by the child's foster father. The court did not identify the specific constitutional right that formed the basis for the § 1983 action, but it did devote significant discussion to the liability issue. It must be noted that in the absence of a constitutional violation there would be no need to consider liability. Thus, by inference alone, it can be concluded that the court in *Doe I* found that there existed a constitutional right to be free from physical and sexual abuse. *See also*

*Doe v. New York City Department of Social Services*, 709 F.2d 782 (2d Cir.), cert. denied, 464 U.S. 864 (1983) (*Doe II*).<sup>9</sup>

This Court also finds *P.L.C. v. Housing Authority of the County of Warren*, 588 F. Supp. 961 W.D. Pa. 1984) and *Doe "A" v. Special School District of St. Louis County*, 637 F. Supp. 1138 (E.D. Mo. 1986) to be persuasive. The plaintiff in *P.L.C.* brought a § 1983 action against the Authority after she was raped by the defendant's employee who entered her apartment with a key provided by the Housing Authority. In a summary fashion, Judge Weber noted that "plaintiff's right to be free from such bodily injury and harm is a right of constitutional magnitude." *P.L.C.*, 588 F. Supp. at 962.

The district court in *Doe "A"* reached a similar conclusion. That case was instituted by nine handicapped children who were physically beaten and sexually abused by the individual who drove them back and forth to school. The court's discussion, regarding the existence of a constitutional right, is insightful.

The acts of abuse alleged by plaintiffs state a substantive due process claim. The acts intrude

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<sup>9</sup>In an opinion written by Judge Sloviter, sitting by designation on the Second Circuit, the court reversed the granting of a judgment notwithstanding the verdict. Accordingly, the court held that the evidence was sufficient for a jury to conclude that the state agency, acted with deliberate indifference in regard to the plaintiff's physical safety.

upon the personal privacy and bodily integrity of these children. The acts intrude in ways more personal and private than a jailhouse beating and in ways which will surely leave psychological scars long after physical healing is complete. Moreover, these acts are keenly distressing given the helplessness and blamelessness of the victims. . . . The alleged acts of defendant Cerny [busdriver] and the alleged tolerance of these acts by SSD [the School District] and the individual defendants pass beyond the pale of common law torts. They shock the conscience of this Court.

*Doe "A"*, 637 F. Supp. at 1145. Although this Court is not bound by the holding in *Doe "A"* it deliberately adopts that court's well-reasoned rationale and conclusion.<sup>10</sup> —

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<sup>10</sup>Additional support for this conclusion can be adduced from *Estate of Bailey by Oare v. County of York*, 768 F.2d 503 (3d Cir. 1985). That case was brought by a father, on behalf of himself and his deceased child, after the brutal abuse inflicted on his daughter resulted, in her untimely death. In reviewing the district court's Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) dismissal, the appellate court noted: "Significantly, the court did not hold that Aleta or her father did not have a cognizable constitutional right. *There is a liberty interest in being free from physical assault* that can be fairly attributed to the action of a state." *Id.* at 509 n.7 (emphasis added).

This court does not view the physical abuse that rose to a constitutional right in *Estate of Bailey*, to be qualitatively different from the infliction of sexual abuse and harassment experienced by the plaintiff in the instant action.

Therefore, this Court holds that the constitutional right, to be free from state intrusions into the realm of personal privacy and bodily security, in the ways alleged in the complaint, is well-established in law. The acts of sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation inflicted by Edward Wright on Kathleen Stoneking, literally shocks the conscience of this Court. As evidenced by the case law, abuse of this type is not tolerated when the victim is a prison inmate or a patient in a state hospital. See, e.g., *Withers v. Levine*, 615 F.2d 158 (4th Cir.), cert. denied, 449 U.S. 849 (1980)<sup>11</sup>; *Spence v. Staras*, 507 F.2d 554 (7th Cir. 1974).<sup>12</sup> Clearly then, the constitution must offer school children similar protection. Thus, the Court unequivocally rejects the defendants' assertion that the facts of this case fail to support a violation of a constitutional right.

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<sup>11</sup>The issue in *Withers* was whether the plaintiff had an eighth amendment right to be free from abuse inflicted by fellow prisoners. Accordingly, the court held: "A prisoner has a constitutional right 'to be reasonably protected from the constant, threat of violence and sexual assault from his fellow inmates.'" *Withers*, 615 F.2d at 161.

<sup>12</sup>The action in *Spence* was brought on behalf of a son who had been beaten to death by fellow patients in a state mental hospital. The plaintiff alleged that the defendants recklessly ignored the twenty odd beatings that had previously occurred. In reviewing a dismissal of the action, the appellate court held that, "[a]ssuming, as we must on a motion to dismiss, that the plaintiff can prove these allegations, the defendants inaction was of sufficient magnitude to constitute a deprivation of rights under § 1983." *Spence*, 507 F.2d at 557.

## 2. Color of State Law

### a. Individual defendants

The next step in the evaluation of the plaintiff's § 1983 claim is determining whether the individual defendants owed a specific duty to the plaintiff. It must then be determined whether there is evidence of a breach of that duty.

#### i. Defendants' duty

The resolution of the first part of this issue is complicated by the fact that neither Defendant Smith, Defendant Miller nor Defendant Shuey committed the abusive acts that are alleged in the complaint. Therefore, in order to establish the requisite duty, the plaintiff must show the existence of a "special relationship" between the individual defendants and herself.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>In support of their position that there is no special relationship between themselves and the plaintiff, the defendants point out that a teacher is not considered a "person responsible for the child's welfare," see 11 P.S. § 2203, and does not, therefore, fall within the purview of the Child Protective Services Law. See *Pennsylvania State Educ. Assoc. v. Department of Public Welfare*, 68 Pa. Cmwlth. 279, 449 A.2d 89 (1982). Thus, defendants Smith, Miller and Shuey were under no statutory duty to report suspected instances of sexual assault that occurred in the Bradford Area High School.

The Court is not persuaded that the failure of the State to impose a statutory duty, to mandatorily report suspected cases of child abuse perpetrated by school teachers, is controlling in this case. In ruling as it did in *Pennsylvania State Education*, the Commonwealth Court merely concluded that the Child Protective Services Law as intended to focus on and remedy abuse that occurred within the structure of a family or a family-like environment. Accordingly, the court observed that "the clear import of . . . [the

The Supreme Court's opinion in *Martinez v. California*, 444 U.S. 277 (1980) opened the door to the concept that "duty" in a constitutional tort could be contingent on the finding of a special relationship. In *Martinez* a civil rights action was brought by the parents of a young woman who was murdered by a state parolee. Although the focus of the dismissal was on lack of causation--the murder did not occur until five months after the parole--the Supreme Court did imply that under a different set of circumstances, at least a duty might be imposed. See *Martinez*, 444 U.S. at 285.

Courts were quick to pick up on the Supreme Court's implications. Thus, in certain § 1983 cases the focus became the nature of the relationship between the plaintiff and the state actor.<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., *Estate of Bailey*, 768 F.2d

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statutory language] is that persons responsible for the child's welfare customarily provide such matters as housing, clothing, furnishings, income and medical care for children in their care." *Pennsylvania State Education*, 68 Pa. Cmwlth. at 283, 449 A.2d at 92. Teachers do not serve those functions and are not, therefore, covered by the Act.

Notwithstanding the court's observation, regarding the noncustodial role of teachers, teachers and school administrators do stand in a special relationship with students. Children are required by law to attend school. See 24 P.S. § 13-1327. And authority over children who attend their schools. See 24 P.S. § 13-1317. Clearly, then there is a special relationship that exists among these parties.

<sup>14</sup>Interestingly, some courts have identified the "special relationship" as a relationship between the plaintiff and the third person who committed the wrongful act. For example, in *Humann v. Wilson*, 696 F.2d 783, 784 (10th

at 510; (action brought by father against agency charged with protecting child from abusive family situations); *Fox v. Curtis*, 712 F.2d 84 (4th Cir. 1983); (action brought against state corrections employees who were charged with postrelease supervision of a parolee); *Bowers v. DeVito*, 686 F.2d 616 (7th Cir. 1982); *Doe I*, 649 F.2d 134 (action brought against state agency charged with overseeing foster care placements); *P.L.C.*, 568 F. Supp. 961 (action brought by female resident against Housing Authority).

The court's opinion in *Bowers v. DeVito* is worth additional consideration. That case was brought on behalf of a woman who was murdered by a person who had been recently released from a state mental facility. The offender had a seven year record of severe mental health problems and was known by the state actors to be extremely violent. In affirming the summary judgment order, entered on behalf of the State, the appellate court announced that "there is no constitutional right to be protected by the state against being murdered by criminals or madmen." *Bowers*, 686 F.2d at 618. The court did go on to qualify that statement, however.

We do not want to pretend that the line between action and inaction, between inflicting

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Cir. 1983) it was noted: "the Court considered the fact that the plaintiffs' decedent did not stand in any special relationship to the parolee from which the parole officers might have inferred a special danger to her."

and failing to prevent the infliction of harm is clearer than it is. *If the state puts a man in a position of danger from private persons and then fails to protect him, it will not be heard to say that its role was merely passive; it is as much an active tortfeasor as if it had thrown him into a snake pit.* It is on this theory that state prison personnel are sometimes held liable under § 1983 for the violence of one prison inmate against another.

*Id.* (emphasis added).

Returning to the instant action, it is clear that although the plaintiff was not within the custodial care of the defendants, she did spend a large part of her day in an environment where defendants had ultimate control. As principal, assistant principal and superintendent of the Bradford Area High School, the defendants possessed certain power and were cloaked with certain authority.<sup>15</sup> These defendants were charged with the duty of ensuring that the school environment was a safe one for students. Therefore, this

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<sup>15</sup>24 P.S. § 13-1317 specifically provides:

Every teacher, vice principal and principal in the public schools shall have the right to exercise the same authority as to conduct and behavior over the pupils attending his, school, during the time they are in attendance, including the time required in going to and from their homes, as the parents, guardians or persons in parental relation to such pupils may exercise over them.

Court concludes that a special relationship exists between the plaintiff and the individual defendants.

## **ii. Breach of duty**

The next issue before this Court is whether the defendants have breached their duty to the plaintiff. The defendants assert that any professional decisions they made are presumptively correct and that liability could not attach under such a circumstance. Accordingly, the defendants rely on the Supreme Court's decision in *Youngberg v. Romeo*, 457 U.S. 307 (1982).

The issue in *Youngberg* involved the due process rights of an individual committed to a state institution for the mentally retarded. After holding that the plaintiff had certain due process rights, the Court went on to explain that those rights were not absolute. Rather, the Court advised, a balance must be reached between the rights of the individual and the day-to-day demands realized by the institution. In recognizing this balance, the Supreme Court adopted the position set forth by Chief Judge Seitz's in his concurring opinion.

Accordingly, the Supreme Court held:

We think the standard articulated by Chief Judge Seitz affords the necessary guidance and reflects the proper balance between the legitimate interests of the State and the rights of the involuntarily committed to reasonable

conditions of safety and freedom from unreasonable restraints. He would have held that 'the Constitution only requires that the courts make certain that professional judgment in fact was exercised. It is not appropriate for the courts to specify which of several professionally, acceptable choices should have been made.'

*Youngberg*, 457 U.S. at 321.

The Supreme Court went on to hold that in deciding what is "reasonable" the courts must afford deference to the judgment of professionals. Thus:

the decision, if made by a professional, is presumptively valid; liability may be imposed only when the decision by the professional is such a substantial departure from accepted professional judgment, practice, or standards as to demonstrate that the person responsible actually did not base the decision on such a judgment.

*Id.* at 323.

The defendants in the instant action argue that since the plaintiff's claim of liability is based on policy decisions made by Shuey, Smith and Miller, i.e., failing to investigate Wright's background before hiring him and failing to detect and/or investigate students, complaints of abuse, *Youngberg* controls. "Neither this Court nor any jury is permitted to substitute its judgment for that of the profes-

sionals to whom these matters are properly delegated." See Defendants Brief Submitted in Companion Case at 24. Therefore, according to the defendants, the policy decisions are presumptively correct and the plaintiffs, basis for liability must fail.

The flaw in defendants, argument is that it fails to take into account the situation where a decision, though made by a professional, is a "substantial departure from accepted professional judgment, practice or standards." In such a case the presumption of correctness is negated. The plaintiff must be afforded an opportunity to rebut the presumption of correctness.<sup>16</sup>

In opposition to the defendants, motion for summary judgment, the plaintiff submitted the affidavit of Dr. Chet C. Kent, Superintendent of Keystone Oaks School District, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The affidavit states that the policies adopted by the defendants, for dealing with suspected cases of sexual assault or sexual harassment, deviated significantly from the norm. See Affidavit of Dr.

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<sup>16</sup>As the Supreme Court noted in *Youngberg*:

All members of the Court of Appeals agreed that respondents' [plaintiff's] expert testimony should have been admitted. . . . [W]e have no reason to disagree with the view that the evidence was admissible. It may be relevant to whether petitioners' [defendants'] decisions were a substantial departure from the requisite professional judgment.

*Youngberg*, 457 U.S. at 323.

Kent at 14, 18-22. Based on the affidavit of Dr. Kent, this Court concludes that there are genuine issues of material fact pertaining to the question of defendants, compliance with "accepted professional judgment, practice or standards."

### **iii. Applicable standard**

The final inquiry pertaining to the liability of the individual defendants is the standard to be applied. In its recent decision of *Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327, 106 S. Ct. 662 (1986), the Supreme Court held that "the Due Process Clause is simply not implicated by a *negligent* act of an official causing unintended loss of or injury to life, liberty or property." *Id.* at 663. Thus, it has been held that more than mere negligence is needed to establish liability on the part of state actors.

Despite defendants, allegations that "the record is bare of any conduct of these defendants that even begins to approach the requisite standard," see Defendants, Brief Submitted in Companion Case at 21, this Court finds that the plaintiff has presented sufficient evidence to suggest that there is a genuine issue of material fact. In addition to the affidavit of Dr. Kent, there is evidence by which a jury could conclude that: (1) the defendants were reckless in their handling of the 1979 incident involving Judy Grove Sowers; (2) the defendants were reckless in their failure to investigate other reported incidents involving Mr. Wright and female students and (3) the defendants were reckless

in their attempts to remedy and/or rectify the problems involving Mr. Wright. In light of this evidence this Court holds that the issue of liability is one for the jury to decide.<sup>17</sup>

#### **b. Liability of the School District**

The pivotal case in the area of municipal liability under § 1983 is *Monell v. Department of Social Services of City of New York*, 436 U.S. 658 (1978). Reversing its earlier decision in *Monroe v. Pape*, 365 U.S. 167 (1961), the Supreme Court in *Monell* held that a municipal corporation is a person for purposes of § 1983. Therefore, a municipality may be liable for damages that arise out of a violation of a constitutional right. As determined by the Court in *Monell*, however, municipal liability is not without limits.

In addressing the exposure of municipal corporations to § 1983 liability, the *Monell* Court excluded liability based on principles of respondent superior. The Court noted: "Congress did not intend municipalities to be held liable unless action pursuant to official municipal policy of some

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<sup>17</sup>The defendants also contend that there is no evidence that their acts were the cause of the injuries sustained by the plaintiff. Again, this Court concludes that this issue is one best left for the jury. The deposition testimony suggests that the defendants handling of the incident involving Judy Sowers Grove provided Mr. Wright with additional ammunition with which to coerce and/or manipulate the plaintiff. See Deposition of Kathleen Stoneking at 225, 250-51 (September 12, 1986). See also Deposition of Kim Harbaugh at 409-16, 432-34; Deposition of Lisa Rovito at 173, 234.

nature caused a constitutional tort. In particular, we conclude that a municipality cannot be held liable *solely* because it employs a tortfeasor." *Monell*, 436 U.S. at 691. Rather, "it is when execution of a government's policy or custom, whether made by its lawmakers or by those whose edicts or acts may fairly be said to represent official policy, inflicts the injury that the government as an entity is responsible under § 1983." *Id.* at 694.

The Court in *Monell* did not delve into the differences between a "policy" and a "custom," but did point out that municipal liability could attach if either were established. Advisedly, the Court noted:

although the touchstone of the § 1983 action against a government body is an allegation that official policy is responsible for deprivation of rights protected by the Constitution, local governments, like every other § 1983 "person," by the very terms of the statute, may be sued for constitutional deprivations visited pursuant to governmental "custom" *even though such a custom has not, received formal approval through the body's official decision-making channels.*

*Id.* 690-91 (Emphasis added).

In recent cases the Supreme Court has expounded on the issue of "municipal liability." See, e.g., *Brandon v. Holt*, 469 U.S. 464 (1985); *City of Oklahoma City v. Tuttle*, 471

U.S. 791 (1985). The Court's holding in *Brandon* is particularly instructive.

*Brandon* was instituted by individuals who had been "viciously assaulted" by a Memphis City police officer; the action was filed against the director of the police department in his official capacity. In awarding the plaintiffs compensatory damages the district court concluded that the director of the department, although *without* actual knowledge, should have known that the police officer who perpetrated the attack had "dangerous propensities." Holding that the director was shielded from liability by the doctrine of qualified immunity, the appellate court reversed the district court's decision.

The Supreme Court was of a different opinion. The Court concluded that "judgment against a public servant, in his official capacity, imposes liability on the entity that he represents provided, of course, the public entity received notice and an opportunity to respond." *Brandon*, 469 U.S. at 471-72. Thus, liability imposed on the Director of the City Police, in his official capacity, would result in liability on the part of the municipal entity.

Decided just a few months after *Brandon*, the Court's decision in *Tuttle* addresses a different aspect of municipal liability. In *Tuttle* the Court was called on to decide whether jury instructions in a "failure to adequately train" case comported with the applicable law. In reaching its decision that the charge did not comport with the law, the

Court expounded on the requirement of an official custom or policy.

The Court attempted to distinguish the difference between a policy or custom that was itself unconstitutional and one that was not.<sup>18</sup> The Court set forth the following parameters.

Proof of a single incident of unconstitutional activity is not sufficient to impose liability under *Monell*, unless proof of the incident includes proof that it was caused by an existing, unconstitutional municipal policy, which policy can be attributed to a municipal policymaker. Otherwise the existence of the unconstitutional policy, and its origin, must be separately proved. But where the policy relied upon is not itself unconstitutional, considerably more proof than the single incident will be necessary in every case to establish both the requisite fault on the part of the municipality, and the causal connection between the "policy" and the constitutional deprivation.

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<sup>18</sup>The Supreme Court expressly declined to rule on the issue of whether a policy that was not itself unconstitutional could ever meet the policy requirement of *Monell*. *Tuttle*, 471 U.S. at 804 n.7.

Read together, *Brandon* and *Tuttle* seem to suggest at least two conclusions. First, if a "municipal servant" is found to be liable, in his or her official capacity, for constitutional violations, then, the municipality will also be liable. Second, if a policy, practice or custom of a municipal entity is not itself unconstitutional, liability will only attach if there is proof of more than a single episode of a constitutional deprivation.

In the instant action, the plaintiff alleges that the School District, acting through Dr. Smith, Mr. Miller and Mr. Shuey, had a practice or custom of failing to take appropriate action with respect to teachers who posed a threat to the health, safety and welfare of female students. More specifically, the plaintiff alleges that the School District failed to investigate reports of sexual abuse and permitted teachers to remain in charge of extracurricular activities despite the knowledge that these teachers presented a danger to female participants. According to the plaintiff, the above mentioned practice or custom of the School District was the proximate cause of her injuries.

In order to determine whether the School District, acting through its agents, had a practice or custom that "caused" the plaintiff's injuries, such that municipal liability will attach, this Court must review the allegations and depositions. The first incident that purports to support the

inference that the defendants had a practice or custom occurred in late 1977 or early 1978.<sup>19</sup>

According to the deposition testimony of Theresa Rodgers, she was sexually accosted by her social studies teacher, Rodgers, Richard DeMarte, in her senior year. Ms. Rodgers testified that she immediately reported this incident to Mr. Miller and Dr. Smith, whereupon she was warned that it was going to be her word against Mr. DeMarte's and that she should not go home and tell her parents about the assault. Ms. Rodgers further testified that the principal suggested that she stay away from Mr. DeMarte, if at all possible, and then counselled her that he would take care of it. Deposition of Theresa Rodgers at 113-14.

Despite Dr. Smith's assurance that "he would take care of it," Theresa Rodgers was never informed of any action taken against Mr. DeMarte. Mr. DeMarte's personnel file, maintained by the School District, conspicuously lacks any record of disciplinary action taken against him during the pertinent time period. In fact, Dr. Smith gave Mr. DeMarte a perfect score on his teaching evaluation, remarkably, an evaluation that included assessment of "emotional stability," "social adjustment," "judgment" and "habits of conduct." See Plaintiff's Exhibit 4 filed in Companion Case.

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<sup>19</sup>See Deposition of Theresa Rodgers at 108.

Additionally, female students voiced complaints against Mr. DeMarte in January, 1981; March, 1981; November, 1982 and October, 1985.<sup>20</sup> Dr. Smith and Mr. Miller had direct notice of all these complaints. Mr. Shuey was informed of at least two of the above noted complaints. See Defendants, Second Supplemental Brief Submitted in Companion Case at 4. The personnel file of Mr. DeMarte is silent as to these incidents. Furthermore, it is not clear what, if any, disciplinary action was taken against the teacher. Significantly, Mr. DeMarte is still coaching the girls, tennis team.

The next critical series of events, upon which liability of the School District is based, occurred in the fall of 1979. At that time, Judy Grove, a high senior and member of the band, reported to Mr. Miller and Dr. Smith that the band director, Edward Wright, had sexually assaulted her.<sup>21</sup>

It will fall to a jury to ascertain the exact sequence of events that immediately preceded and followed Judy

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<sup>20</sup>As conveyed to the administration, Mr. DeMarte attempted to molest a young woman during Homecoming activities. Both Dr. Smith and Mr. Miller received notice of the complaint.

<sup>21</sup>Mr. Miller testified that, prior to talking to Judy, he had received a phone call from Mr. Wright informing him about the "rumors" involving Ms. Grove. Apparently, Mr. Wright was seeking advice on how to quiet the rumors. See Deposition of Mr. Miller at 55-56.

Grove's disclosure. A review of the deposition testimony of Frederick Smith, Richard Miller, Judy Grove, and her father, Hayward Grove, demonstrates a great divergence of views. However, for purposes of summary judgment, the evidence must be viewed in the light most favorable to the non-moving party. Additionally, the Court must consider reasonable inferences that might be drawn in favor of the plaintiff. Since the testimony of Judy Grove is most favorable to the plaintiff, the Court will review that testimony in some detail.<sup>22</sup>

Although Ms. Grove's recollections, regarding specific dates and times, were somewhat vague, her deposition testimony was rather emphatic on other points. Judy Grove testified that she relayed the incident of the sexual assault to both Mr. Miller and Dr. Smith.<sup>23</sup> According to her testimony, Dr. Smith implied that in light of the circumstances--Judy had been drinking on the evening of the assault--she was responsible for the assault. Dr. Smith warned that she would not look good if the facts got out. Judy reports that she was frightened and felt as though

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<sup>22</sup>Despite defendants' characterization of Ms. Grove's testimony, as "ridiculous," "preposterous" and "incredible," see Defendants Supplemental Brief Submitted in Companion Case at 4, 9, the Court accepts the testimony as plausible.

<sup>23</sup>Mr. Shuey was apprised of the incident involving Judy Grove and Edward Wright by both Mr. Miller and Dr. Smith. See Deposition of Mr. Shuey at 17-22.

she was receiving no support from the Administrators. It was only after being threatened with public disclosure and personal humiliation that Judy retracted, in a rather flip-pant fashion, that the assault had occurred.<sup>24</sup>

Sometime after these initial meetings, Judy's father requested a conference. Prior to inviting Judy into the conference, Mr. Miller and Dr. Smith talked with Mr. Grove. Mr. Grove testified that an effort was made to convince him that no teacher would behave in the fashion alleged by Judy. See Deposition of Hayward Grove at 36,

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<sup>24</sup>Q: He, [Dr. Smith] told you it was your fault, or is that the impression you had?

A: No. He said it was my fault. That's why he wanted to clear up the rumors because he wanted the band to get back on their feet again.

Q: Did you tell him during that conversation that the rumors were not correct?

A: He had told me that if the rumors were true I would be--I could find myself in front of a jury, in front of a judge, telling exactly what happened, that being that I had been drinking [and that I was] at his house voluntarily, I would look like--I wouldn't look very good, is what he said. At that point I said, "Forget it. It's not true."

Q: So whatever the reason, you did tell Dr. Smith that these rumors were not true--

A: He told me that my parents would be called; he would call my father down and my mother right then. I said, "Forget it. I don't want to go through with it." You know. "Just forget it." . . . " If I have to go through all of this they're not true."

Deposition of Judy Grove at 46-47 (September 12, 1986).

41. Although when Mr. Grove entered the meeting he was confident that his daughter's version of the facts were true, he admitted to being less certain after conferring with these Administrators. *Id.*<sup>25</sup>

One of the topics of discussion at the above mentioned conference was whether Judy would be able to remain in the band. As perceived by both Judy and her father she had a choice: recant her story in front of the assembled band or withdraw from all band activities. See Deposition of Judy Grove at 59-60, 68; Deposition of Hayward Grove at 44, 47, 49. As recalled by Judy, the suggestion to appear before the band and dispel the "rumors," about Mr. Wright, originated with Dr. Smith. See Deposition of Judy Grove at 74 (September 12, 1986).

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<sup>25</sup>Another critical fact relates to Judy's deliberate attempt to seek help from Gene Dillard, an independent alcohol and drug counsellor. Mr. Dillard spent time at the Bradford Area High School in September, 1979. At the conclusion of all group informational sessions, Mr. Dillard invited students to talk with him individually. Judy Grove seized that opportunity and confided in Mr. Dillard.

As set forth in his deposition testimony, Judy told Mr. Dillard that she had been sexually assaulted by Mr. Wright. With the express consent of Judy, this information was directly relayed to Dr. Smith and Mr. Miller. Mr. Dillard offered his opinion that other students had probable been subject to Wright's abuses. The Administrators assured Mr. Dillard that the matter would be taken care of.

In early January, 1980, Dr. Smith assembled all the band members.<sup>26</sup> He proceeded to acknowledge that rumors had been circulating and that a certain student would address those rumors. The floor was turned over to Judy. As recalled by Judy, pressed with questions by her peers, she fled the room in tears. It is not clear whether an apology was ever actually offered.

The episode of the forced apology has special significance in light of the assaultive conduct that occurred between Edward Wright and Kathleen Stoneking. Apparently, the "forced apology" served as a trump card in the hands of Edward Wright. When a student would threaten to disclose the abuse, Wright quickly reminded his victim about the "Judy Grove incident." His message was clear and convincing: "No one believed Judy Grove, why would anyone believe you." See *infra* Note 17. His tactical threat proved to be quite effective at least for a period of time.

In reviewing the above events, for the purpose of evaluating the liability of the School District, this Court need not decide whether the School District had a practice or custom, of dealing with complaints of sexual abuse or harassment, which "caused" the plaintiff's injuries. Nor is

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<sup>26</sup>At, or about the same time, Dr. Smith directed Mr. Wright to cease all one-on-one contact with female students. The enforcement of this directive was left solely up to Mr. Wright.

it for this Court to determine whether Dr. Smith, Mr. Miller and Mr. Shuey are liable in their official capacities, such that liability could be imputed to the School District. *See Brandon*. 469 U.S. 464. Rather, this Court is charged with the task of evaluating the record evidence and determining whether genuine issues of material facts exist. The ultimate issue of liability is one with which the jury must wrestle.

For the purposes of this motion, the Court concludes that there is sufficient evidence from which a jury could infer the existence of a practice or custom. Additionally, it could be inferred from the evidence that the School District was responsible for the practice or custom and that the practice or custom caused the plaintiff's injuries. Thus, the defendants' motion, as it pertains to the liability of the School District, must be denied.

### **C. Qualified Immunity**

The standard to be applied in resolving a qualified immunity issue is well-settled. In *Harlow v. Fitzgerald*, 457 U.S. 800, (1982), the Supreme Court revised the qualified immunity standard and held that "government officials performing discretionary functions generally are shielded from liability for civil damages insofar as their conduct does not violate clearly established statutory or constitutional rights, of which a reasonable person would have known." *Id.* at 818. Thus, the pending question, in terms of the qualified immunity defense, is whether the plaintiff had a

constitutional right which at the time of the alleged violation, was clearly established.

As the Court concluded in Section IV B (1) of this opinion, the plaintiff has alleged a viable claim of a constitutional violation. According to the Court's conclusion, there is a special relationship that existed between the plaintiff and the individual defendants. As a result of this relationship defendants had a duty to provide a reasonably safe environment for the plaintiff. There is nothing new or novel about this constitutional right or this duty. See, e.g., *Ingraham v. Wright*, 430 U.S. 651 (1977); *Martinez v. California*, 444 U.S. 277 (1980); *Spence v. Staras*, 507 F.2d 554 (7th Cir. 1974); *Withers v. Levine*, 615 F.2d 158 (4th Cir. 1980); *Doe I*, 649 F.2d 134 (2d Cir. 1981); *Stokes v. Delcambre*, 710 F.2d 1120 (5th Cir. 1983).

This Court concludes that a reasonable person would have been aware that the plaintiff had a substantive due process right to be free from intrusions into her "personal privacy and bodily integrity." As the court in *Hall v. Tawney*, 621 F.2d 607 (4th Cir. 1980) so aptly stated:

[t]he existence of this right to ultimate bodily security--the most fundamental aspect of personal privacy--is unmistakably established in our constitutional decisions as an attribute of the ordered liberty that is the concern of substantive due process. Numerous cases in a variety of contexts recognize it as the last line of de-

fense against those literally outrageous abuses of official power whose very variety makes formulation of a more precise standard impossible. Clearly recognized in persons charged with or suspected of crime and in the custody of police officers, we simply do not see how we can fail also to recognize it in public school teachers.

*Id.* at 613. Thus, defendants are not entitled to qualified immunity.

#### **D. Pendent State Claims**

Since the Court denied the defendant's motion for summary judgment, as it pertained to the plaintiff's § 1983 claims, this Court retains subject matter jurisdiction over the pendent state claims. See *United Mine Workers v. Gibbs*, 383 U.S. 715 (1966).

The only remaining question is whether the complaint sets forth state law claims. The plaintiff's complaint does not identify a specific state law cause of action;<sup>27</sup> the

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<sup>27</sup>Reference in the complaint to 42 Pa. C.S.A. § 8550 appears to be offered only as a means of demonstrating that the doctrine of "official immunity" may fail to shield these defendants from suit.

In part, 42 Pa. C.S.A. § 8550 provides:

In any action against a local agency or employee thereof nor damages on account of an injury caused by the act of the employee in which it is judicially determined that the act of the employee caused the

pleadings are not sufficient to give notice of the claim alleged. Thus, this Court concludes that the motion for summary judgment, as it pertains to the state law claims set forth in Counts II, IV and VI, is granted.

An appropriate order shall be issued.

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injury and that such act constituted a crime, actual fraud, actual malice or willful misconduct, the provisions of the sections 8545 (relating to official liability generally), 8546 (relating to defense of official immunity), 8548 (relating to indemnity) and 8549 (relating to limitation on damages) shall not apply.

## ORDER

MENCER, J.

AND NOW, this 28th day of August, 1987, for the reasons set forth in the accompanying Opinion,

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that:

(1) the Motion for Summary Judgment, filed on behalf of the Defendants, Bradford Area School District, Frederick Smith, Richard Miller and Frederick Shuey, is DENIED as the Motion relates to Counts I, III, V and VII of the Complaint;

(2) the Motion for Summary Judgment, filed on behalf of the defendants, is GRANTED as it pertains to Counts II, IV and VI of the Complaint.

Judgment is entered in favor of the Defendants and against the Plaintiff, Kathleen Stoneking, on Count II, Count IV and Count VI of the Complaint.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Defendants shall file a Pretrial Narrative Statement by September 18, 1987. The trial, scheduled for September 8, 1987, is continued. A Pretrial Conference shall be held on Wednesday, October 7, 1987, at 4:00 pm in Room 310, United States Courthouse, Erie, Pennsylvania.



**F. Order, Denial of Defendants' Petition  
to Appeal Issue and Statute of Limitations,  
U.S. Court of Appeals for Third Circuit,  
No. 87-8061, October 21, 1987**



UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE THIRD CIRCUIT

No. 87-8061

**KATHLEEN STONEKING, Appellee**

v.

**BRADFORD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT, etc., et al.,**  
(W.D. D.C. Civil No. 87-63 E)

Present: SLOVITER and BECKER, Circuit Judges.

Petition for permission to appeal,

Brief in Opposition to appellants' petition for per-  
mission to appeal,

/s/ Martha Sanchez  
Deputy Clerk 7-3080

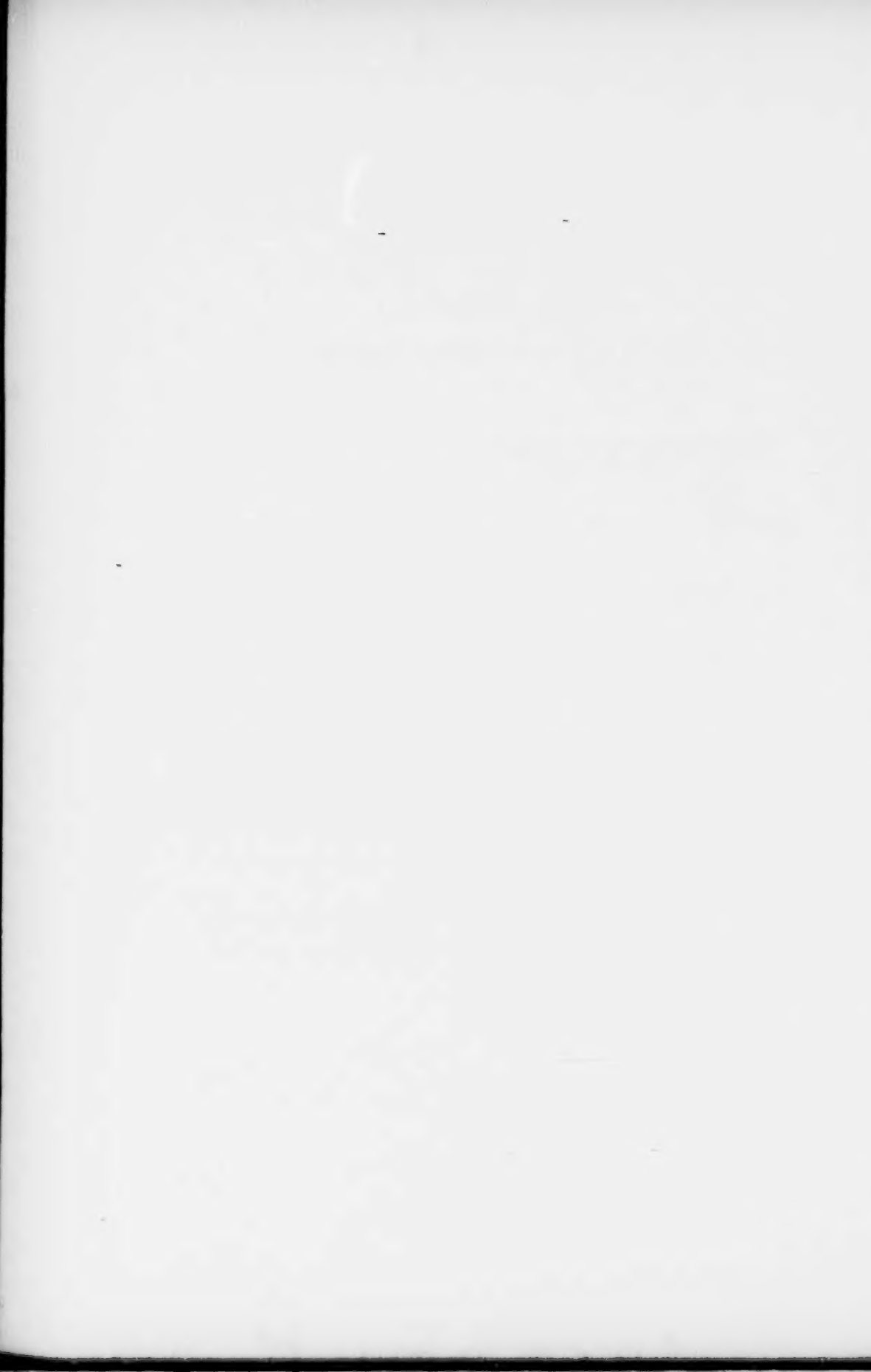
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Defendants' petition for permission to appeal the  
district court's ruling on the statute of limitations question  
is denied.

For the Court,

/s/ Dolores K. Sloviter

Dated: October 21, 1987



**G. Opinion of U.S. Court of Appeals for  
Third Circuit, No. 87-3637, September 12, 1988**

*Stoneking v. Bradford Area School District, et al.*



UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE THIRD CIRCUIT

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NO. 87-3637

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KATHLEEN STONEKING

v.

BRADFORD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT, FREDERICK  
SMITH, in his individual and official capacity as  
principal of the Bradford Area High School;  
RICHARD MILLER, in his individual and official  
capacity as assistant principal of the Bradford Area  
High School; and FREDERICK SHUEY, in his  
individual and official capacity as Superintendent of  
the Bradford Area School District,

Frederick Smith, Richard Miller  
and Frederick Shuey,

*Appellants*

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On Appeal from the United States District  
Court for the Western District  
of Pennsylvania (ERIE)  
(D.C. Civil No. 87-00063 E)

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Argued February 3, 1988

Before: SLOVITER, STAPLETON, and MANSMANN,  
*Circuit Judges*

(Filed September 12, 1988)

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Erie, PA 16501

Attorneys for Appellee

OPINION OF THE COURT

SLOVITER, *Circuit Judge.*

I.

*Facts*

This is an appeal by the individual defendants from the district court's order denying their motion for summary judgment on the grounds of qualified immunity in an action brought under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 (1982). We have jurisdiction of this appeal under 28 U.S.C. § 1291 (1982). *See Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 530 (1985); *Hynson v. City of Chester*, 827 F.2d 932, 933 (3d Cir. 1987), *cert. denied*, 108 S. Ct. 702 (1988). Our review of a grant or denial of summary judgment is plenary and, like the district court, we must view the facts in the light most favorable to the non-moving party. *See Anderson v. Liberty Lobby*,

*Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 255 (1986); *see also* *Hynson*, 827 F.2d at 933.

In *Mitchell*, the Supreme Court stated that "a defendant pleading qualified immunity is entitled to dismissal before the commencement of discovery." 472 U.S. at 526. Defendants agree that in this case we need look only at the pleadings. Appellants' Brief at 5. We turn, therefore, to the allegations of the complaint.

Kathleen Stoneking, during the relevant period a student at the Bradford Area High School, brought this action against the Bradford Area School District, Frederick Smith, the principal of the Bradford Area High School, Richard Miller, the assistant principal, and Frederick Shuey, the superintendent of the Bradford Area School District.

She alleges that the School District hired Edward Wright to serve as its band director in 1976; that during Wright's tenure as band director the band won numerous competitions and Wright enjoyed strong support and backing of the School District and its officials; that a female member of the band informed Principal Smith in 1979 that Wright had attempted to rape and/or sexually assault her but that Smith failed to conduct an investigation or report the allegations to appropriate authorities and instead required the student to issue a public apology to Wright and retract her allegations; that Smith instructed Wright to have no further "one on one" contact with female band members; that plaintiff Stoneking participated in the band during her sophomore, junior and senior years until her graduation in 1983; and that beginning in October 1980 and continuing thereafter until May of 1985, Wright, through physical force, threats of reprisal, intimidation and coercion, sexually abused Stoneking, harassed her, and forced her to engage in various sexual acts with him at various places, including the high school's band room and its

environs, Wright's vehicle and house, and on trips for band functions. The complaint also alleges that in March 1986 Wright resigned after a psychologist reported a complaint concerning Wright's sexual abuse of another female band member, and that he was thereafter prosecuted criminally for various sex-related crimes.

Stoneking pleads that there was a special custodial relationship between herself and the defendants, that Smith and Miller had actual notice of the allegations of Wright's sexual misconduct and that Shuey either knew or recklessly failed to discover that Wright was sexually abusing female band members. She alleges that the defendants were intentionally, recklessly and deliberately indifferent to the health, safety and welfare of the female student body in general and the plaintiff in particular in that they failed to report the various incidents of suspected sexual abuse of female band members by Wright; failed to adopt an effective policy or policies to prevent the sexual abuse of female students and to promptly report complaints of such abuse to appropriate authorities; failed to properly and vigorously investigate reports of sexual abuse by Wright of female band members; concealed from parents of female band members and public officials the various complaints and accusations that had been made against Wright since 1979; continued to permit Wright to function as band director despite actual notice that he presented a significant threat; and encouraged and perpetuated the custom and course of conduct at the high school whereby allegations of sexual abuse or mistreatment by Wright and other teachers were not investigated and reported. Stoneking alleges that as a result she suffered severe psychological trauma, including severe depression, loss of self-esteem, mental anguish, embarrassment and humiliation, and she seeks compensatory and punitive damages.

In their answer,<sup>1</sup> defendants deny most of the allegations directed to liability but admit that in 1979 Smith questioned a female band member regarding a possible relationship with Wright, allege that the student denied the relationship and said she had fabricated the story, admit that in 1984 Smith directed Wright not to place himself in a one-on-one situation with female students, admit that Superintendent Shuey was advised of the actions taken by Smith with respect to Wright, and admit that Smith had a chronological miscellaneous file with notations concerning matters raised about Wright.

Following some discovery, defendants moved for summary judgment on the ground, *inter alia*, of qualified immunity.<sup>2</sup> They contended that "no clearly settled law existed, either at the time of the incidents complained of in the plaintiff's Complaint or as of the present time, which would cause a reasonable person to know either of the constitutional right which allegedly has been violated or that the alleged acts or failure to act on the part of the individual defendants

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1. Defendants filed their answer after the court denied their motion to dismiss raising, *inter alia*, qualified immunity as a defense.

2. — The defendants also asserted that Stoneking's federal claim was barred by the applicable statute of limitations, that Stoneking had not established a violation of her constitutional rights, and that she had failed to state a cause of action under either section 1983 or state law. The district court denied the motion as it pertained to the federal claim, but granted it as to the state law claim, stating that "the pleadings are not sufficient to give notice of the claim alleged." *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School Dist.*, 667 F. Supp. 1088, 1103 (W.D. Pa. 1987). The district court later certified its order as it related to the statute of limitations issue for interlocutory appeal and continued the trial of the case pending appeal. By an order dated October 13, 1987, this court denied defendants' petition for permission to appeal the district court's ruling on the statute of limitations issue. *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School Dist.*, No. 87-8061 (3d Cir. Oct. 13, 1987).

would lead to a violation of that constitutional right." Defendants' Motion for Summary Judgment, *Rovito v. Bradford Area School Dist.*, No. 86-133 (W.D. Pa.) (filed April 10, 1987).<sup>3</sup>

The court denied summary judgment on the qualified immunity ground. *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School Dist.*, 667 F. Supp. 1088, 1102 (W.D. Pa. 1987). In its opinion, the court referred to evidence submitted in the cases with which this action was consolidated, *see supra* note 3,<sup>4</sup> including the affidavit of Dr. Chet C. Kent, Superintendent of Keystone Oaks School District, which stated that the policies adopted by the defendants for dealing with suspected cases of sexual assault or sexual harassment deviated significantly from the norm. 677 F. Supp. at 1097-98. The court held that plaintiff had alleged violation of a clearly established constitutional right and that there was evidence by which a jury could conclude that defendants were reckless in their handling of the 1979 incident which involved Judy Grove,<sup>5</sup> in their failure to

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3. Defendants' motions incorporated by reference their comparable motions filed in similar actions filed by two other Bradford Area High School students, Kim Harbaugh and Lisa Rovito, who allege that they were sexually abused by Wright and assert liability on the same basis as does Stoneking. Prior to ruling on the summary judgment motion, the district court consolidated Stoneking's actions for trial with those of Harbaugh and Rovito. *See* 667 F. Supp. at 1089 n.1.

4. In response to an order entered by this court on June 20, 1988, the district court entered an order on July 7, 1988 supplementing the Stoneking record with the materials submitted in the *Harbaugh* and *Rovito* cases.

5. There is evidence that in the fall of 1979, Judy Grove, a female band member, complained to Smith and Miller that Wright had sexually assaulted her, that Grove's complaint was confirmed to Smith and Miller both by Grove's father and by an independent student counselor and that Smith and Miller responded by presenting Grove with the choice of either withdrawing from the

investigate other reported incidents involving Wright and female students,<sup>6</sup> and in their attempts to remedy and/or rectify the problems involving Wright.<sup>7</sup> The court held that in light of the above, the issue of liability is one for the jury to decide.

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band or publicly recanting her story. Grove testified that in 1979, Smith instituted a policy whereby Wright was forbidden from having one-on-one contact with any female student. Defendants' answer admits that Shuey had knowledge of the 1979 Grove incident. Dr. Chet C. Kent opines that the handling of the Grove incident was "so far below the minimum accepted and generally prevailing administrative standard that [it] constituted deliberate or recklessly indifferent conduct . . . ." Affidavit of Chet C. Kent, submitted by Kim Harbaugh in response to Defendants' Motion for Summary Judgment (hereinafter Kent Affidavit) at 17.

6. There is evidence that, for example, in 1984, the year following Stoneking's graduation from the Bradford Area High School, another female band member complained to Smith that she was being sexually abused by Wright. In response, Smith reiterated the no one-on-one policy between Wright and female students that he had instituted in connection with the Grove incident, and told Wright not to discuss the incident with anyone. Smith also informed Shuey of the student's complaint and of the actions that he had taken in response. Kent concludes that in view of the fact that neither Smith nor Shuey investigated the complaint, informed the student's parents, called the child abuse hot line, or disciplined Wright in any way, "their behavior demonstrates deliberate or reckless indifference and callous disregard for [the student's] safety." Kent Affidavit at 18.

The factual nature of the evidence before the court, *see also supra* note 5 and *infra* note 7, thus distinguishes this case from that of *Scott v. Willis*, 543 A.2d 165 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 1988), on which defendants rely, where the court stated that "in the case at bar, Appellants have not pled any *facts* to suggest that any of the Appellees had notice of [the teacher's] dangerous proclivities." *Id.* at 171 (emphasis in original).

7. The records in the companion cases are replete with evidence of instances of students' complaints to one or more of the defendants of sexual misconduct by various teachers at the

Although, as we noted above, ordinarily qualified immunity can be determined on the basis of the pleadings, the Supreme Court has recognized, as do our cases, that there may be instances in which discovery may be necessary before a motion for summary judgment on qualified immunity grounds can be resolved. See *Anderson v. Creighton*, 107 S. Ct. 3034, 3042 n.6 (1987); see also *Brown v. United States*, 851 F.2d 615, 617 (1988) (record insufficiently developed on qualified immunity issue); *Kovats v. Rutgers*, 822 F.2d 1303, 1313 (3d Cir. 1987) (legal issues on the qualified immunity question "inextricably intertwined" with the factual issue requiring discovery before determination of qualified immunity issue).

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Bradford Area High School. These included a female student's complaint in 1978 that a teacher had made sexual advances to her while she was alone with him in his classroom correcting papers, to which Smith responded by telling her that it would be her word against the teacher's and warning her not to tell her parents; a female student's complaint in January 1981 that the same teacher had kissed her on the neck; another student's complaint in March 1981 that the same teacher had blindfolded her in a sensitivity test and then gotten down on his hands and knees and looked up her dress; another student's complaint in November 1982 that the teacher had asked her to sit on his lap during a party; and a 1985 complaint from the father of a female student that the teacher had placed his hands on his daughter's body. Other incidents included that of a different teacher's having written a suggestive note to a student, and another teacher having had an affair with a student. There is no evidence that defendants investigated or reported any of these complaints, leading Dr. Kent to conclude that, at least as to defendants Smith and Shuey, their behavior "encouraged a climate to flourish where innocent girls were victimized," Kent Affidavit at 20, and that, had Smith and Shuey taken appropriate steps, "Wright would have been prevented from preying on other female band members and a safe school environment would have been created for all girls." Kent Affidavit at 22.

In this case, however, defendants are content to stand on the pleadings. The basis for their claim of immunity was that Stoneking did not have a clearly established right to be free from the sexual abuse of Wright, a member of the school's staff, that they were under no clearly established duty to protect her, and that, in any event, they could not reasonably have known that their conduct might violate any of Stoneking's constitutional rights. Because this argument is premised on the assumption that the facts alleged by Stoneking in her complaint are true, we can evaluate the district court's denial of summary judgment on the qualified immunity issue without consideration of the facts adduced on summary judgment, and refer to those facts only to the extent that they amplify the allegations of the complaint.

## II.

### *Qualified Immunity*

The doctrine of qualified immunity entitles government officials performing discretionary functions to immunity from liability for civil damages when their conduct "does not violate clearly established statutory or constitutional rights of which a reasonable person would have known." *Harlow v. Fitzgerald*, 457 U.S. 800, 818 (1982). The question before us is whether reasonable school officials in the position of defendants and with the information then available to them should have known that their alleged actions or omissions were unlawful. See *Anderson v. Creighton*, 107 S. Ct. 3034, 3040 (1987) (qualified immunity issue is whether "a reasonable officer could have believed [the] warrantless search to be lawful, in light of clearly established law and the information the searching officers possessed").

In this case, where all parties agree that the existence of qualified immunity may be determined

from the pleadings, we need not be concerned with any issue relating to the burden of proof, but rather only with an objective, legal determination of whether the rights alleged were clearly established. *See Harlow*, 457 U.S. at 818-19. *See generally* S. Nahmod, *Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Litigation* § 8.16, at 511 (2d ed. 1986) ("As to the question of the existence of clearly settled law, to speak of a burden of proof with its evidentiary emphasis appears misplaced. . . . [W]hether clearly settled law existed at the time a defendant acted is an issue of law for the court.").

The Supreme Court has recently offered guidance as to what is meant by a "clearly established right," explaining that,

[t]he contours of the right must be sufficiently clear that a reasonable official would understand that what he is doing violates that right. This is not to say that an official action is protected by qualified immunity unless the very action in question has previously been held unlawful, but it is to say that in the light of preexisting law the unlawfulness must be apparent.

*Anderson*, 107 S. Ct. at 3039 (citations omitted). *Anderson* thus supports our precedent interpreting the "clearly established" standard as "requiring some but not precise factual correspondence [between the relevant precedents and the conduct at issue] and demanding that officials apply general, well developed legal principles." *People of Three Mile Island v. Nuclear Regulatory Commissioners*, 747 F.2d 139, 144 (3d Cir. 1984); accord *Kovats v. Rutgers*, 822 F.2d 1303, 1313 (3d Cir. 1987).

The right that Stoneking alleges defendants violated is her "liberty interest to be free in her person from threats, intimidation and sexual abuse as that perpetrated by Wright." App. at 13. Substantial

authority supports the district court's holding that a student has a liberty interest in being free from physical abuse in school. As the court stated in *Hall v. Tawney*, 621 F.2d 607, 613 (4th Cir. 1980), a case involving corporal punishment of a student at school,

[t]he existence of this right to ultimate bodily security -- the most fundamental aspect of personal privacy -- is unmistakably established in our constitutional decisions as an attribute of the ordered liberty that is the concern of substantive due process. Numerous cases in a variety of contexts recognize it as a last line of defense against those literally outrageous abuses of official power whose very variety makes formulation of a more precise standard impossible.

This right was established no later than 1977, when the Supreme Court in *Ingraham v. Wright* held that "corporal punishment in public schools implicates a constitutionally protected liberty interest." 430 U.S. 651, 672 (1977); see also *Garcia v. Miera*, 817 F.2d 650, 656-58 (10th Cir. 1987) (law clearly established by 1982 that excessive corporal punishment could violate student's substantive due process rights), cert. denied, 108 S. Ct. 1220 (1988); cf. *Youngberg v. Romeo*, 457 U.S. 307, 315-16 (1982) (constitutionally protected liberty interest of persons confined in mental institution to safe environment); *Milonas v. Williams*, 691 F.2d 931, 942-43 (10th Cir. 1982) (due process rights of children in quasi-juvenile detention facility violated by certain physically abusive disciplinary practices), cert. denied, 460 U.S. 1069 (1983); *Spence v. Staras*, 507 F.2d 554, 557 (7th Cir. 1974) (constitutional right of persons confined in mental hospital to be free from physical assault by other patients).

Defendants' attempt to distinguish these cases on the grounds that they involved physical, rather than sexual abuse, is unpersuasive. The right at issue is that of personal bodily integrity.<sup>8</sup> We agree with the district court that "common sense suggests that the right to be free from sexual abuse is at least as fundamental as the right to be free from the less intrusive physical abuse of paddling." *Stoneking*, 667 F. Supp. at 1094. We therefore hold that Stoneking had a constitutionally protected right to be free from sexual abuse by her school teachers that was clearly established by 1979, when defendants were put on notice of Wright's alleged abuse of a female student.

In fact, defendants at oral argument conceded that the sexual abuse of Stoneking by Wright was a "constitutional tort," derogating by this concession from their argument that Stoneking had no liberty interest protected by the substantive component of the due process clause. Instead, their argument is that they, in their capacity as school administrators, did not have at the relevant time, and indeed do not now have, a "clearly established" affirmative duty to take steps to protect school children from sexual abuse by a third party, including a staff member. They seek to distinguish the Supreme Court cases delineating state officials' obligation to take affirmative steps to protect a victim of violence on the ground that they arose in a custodial situation, and argue that school administrators do not have the type of special relationship with school children recognized by the law that imposed on them a duty to act in such situations.<sup>9</sup>

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8. In her deposition Stoneking testified that Wright fondled and kissed her breasts, inserted his fingers into her vagina, exposed himself to her and forced her to handle his genitals, and occasionally compelled her to have oral sex with him. Stoneking Deposition II at 341-44, 351-52.

9. This aspect of defendants' qualified immunity argument is properly before us on this appeal. As we held in *Chinchello v.*

Defendants' argument that they had no legal duty to Stoneking is based on cases such as *Martinez v. California*, 444 U.S. 277 (1980), where the Court affirmed the dismissal on proximate cause grounds of a suit against state officials who had paroled a dangerous felon seeking damages for the felon's torture and murder of a fifteen-year old girl five months after his release. The Court explained that, "[t]he parole board was not aware that [plaintiffs'] decedent, as distinguished from the public at large, faced any special danger." *Id.* at 285. Following *Martinez*, this court also held that county officials could not be held liable for the murders of residents in a nearby community committed by an escaped county prisoner. *Commonwealth Bank & Trust Co. v. Russell*, 825 F.2d 12 (3d Cir. 1987).

These cases do not hold, however, that state officials can never be liable for harm committed by a third party. In fact, the Court in *Martinez* cautioned that "[w]e need not and do not decide that a parole officer could never be deemed to 'deprive' someone of life by action taken in connection with the release of a prisoner on parole." 444 U.S. at 285 (footnote omitted). In *Russell*, we stated that "[i]t is clear . . . that § 1983 is not limited to cases of direct harm inflicted by state officials. This is suggested by the distinction made in *Martinez* between that victim there and those who the authorities knew face a 'special danger.'" 825 F.2d at 16.

It is incontestable that custodians have some duty to protect those in their custody from physical abuse by

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Fenton, 805 F.2d 126, 131 (3d Cir. 1986), the "absence of a clearly established legal duty . . . can accurately be described as a contention that [defendant] violated no clearly established legal norm" and "treating [that contention] in this manner will best serve the objectives of *Mitchell*." Of course, this contention must be distinguished from the "I didn't do it" defense, of which we cannot take cognizance at this stage. *Id.*

third persons. See *Youngberg*, 457 U.S. at 324 ("state . . . has the unquestioned duty to provide reasonable safety for all residents . . . within the institution [for the mentally retarded]"); see also *Spence*, 507 F.2d at 557; cf. *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97 (1976) (Eighth Amendment right of prisoner to be provided with adequate medical treatment). Cases after *Martinez* have held that such a duty is not limited to the custodial relationship. Thus, in *Estate of Bailey by Oare v. County of York*, 768 F.2d 503 (3d Cir. 1985), we held that if a state social services agency is aware that a particular child has been abused, a special relationship arises that creates an affirmative duty on the part of the state agency to protect that child from further abuse. See *Wood v. Ostrander*, 851 F.2d 1212, 1218 (1988) (law clearly established that police officer has duty under section 1983 not to abandon passengers of arrested drivers thereby exposing them to unreasonable danger); *Taylor v. Ledbetter*, 818 F.2d 791 (11th Cir. 1987) (in banc) (holding that "a child involuntarily placed in a foster home is in a situation so analogous to a prisoner in a penal institution and a child confined in a mental health facility that the foster child may bring a section 1983 action [against the foster care agency] for violation of fourteenth amendment rights [for failure to protect foster children from abuse]"); *Doe v. New York City Department of Social Services*, 649 F.2d 134, 145-46 (2d Cir. 1981) (state foster care agency has an affirmative duty to protect a child from physical and/or sexual abuse inflicted by the child's foster parents); *White v. Rochford*, 592 F.2d 381, 383-86 & n.6 (7th Cir. 1979) (allegations that police officers, after arresting an adult driver, left the children passengers alone in the car on a busy highway in cold weather stated a claim under the Fourteenth Amendment); *Doe "A" v. Special School Dist.*, 637 F. Supp. 1138, 1143-45 (E.D. Mo. 1986)

(substantive due process right of school children not to be sexually abused by school bus driver); *see also* *Jensen v. Conrad*, 747 F.2d 185, 194 (4th Cir. 1984), *cert. denied*, 470 U.S. 1052 (1985). *Contra Harpole v. Arkansas Dep't of Human Services*, 820 F.2d 932 (8th Cir. 1987); *DeShaney v. Winnebago County Department of Social Services*, 812 F.2d 298 (7th Cir. 1987), *cert. granted*, 108 S. Ct. 1218 (1988).

Stoneking's relationship vis-a-vis her school's principal, assistant principal, and even school district superintendent, is patently not comparable to that of an unidentified "member of the general public, living in the free society, and having no special custodial or other relationship" with state parole officers who released a parolee. *See Fox v. Custis*, 712 F.2d 84, 88 (4th Cir. 1983). Although she was not in a technical sense in defendants' legal "custody," as was the child in *Bailey and Taylor*, she was a member of a known and identifiable class of potential victims -- female students in general, and female band members in particular.

Under Pennsylvania law Stoneking was required to attend school. *See* 24 Pa. Stat. Ann. § 13-1327 (Purdon Supp. 1988); *see also* 24 Pa. Stat. Ann. § 13-1333 (Purdon Supp. 1988) (imposing penalty of fine and/or jail on parents and guardians who violate compulsory education statute). Because students are placed in school at the command of the state and are not free to decline to attend, students are in what may be viewed as functional custody of the school authorities, at least at the time they are present.

It is abundantly clear that "the state has expressly stated its desire to provide affirmative protection" to students. *See Bailey*, 768 F.2d at 509; *see also Jensen*, 747 F.2d at 194-95 n.11. The Pennsylvania Child Protective Services law, 11 Pa. Stat. Ann. § 2202 *et seq.*, provides that "school administrator[s]" are mandated to report suspected child abuse, 11 Pa. Stat.

Ann. § 2204(c) (Purdon Supp. 1988). Even if they were under no statutory duty to report suspected instances of sexual assault perpetrated by teachers, as opposed to that inflicted by parents and other "person[s] responsible for the child's welfare," see *Pennsylvania State Educ. Assoc. v. Department of Public Welfare*, 68 Pa. Commw. 279, 449 A.2d 89 (1982), the Act reflects the state's broad policy "to encourage more complete reporting of suspected child abuse and . . . [to] provid[e] protection for children from further abuse," 11 Pa. Stat. Ann. § 2202 (Purdon Supp. 1988). See generally, Beaty & Woolley, *Child Molesters Need Not Apply: A History of Pennsylvania's Child Protective Services Law and Legislative Efforts to Prevent the Hiring of Abusers by Child Care Agencies*, 89 Dick. L. Rev. 669 (1985).

Moreover, Pennsylvania law has since 1911 explicitly vested school officials with authority *in loco parentis* over students. See 24 Pa. Stat. Ann. § 13-1317 (Purdon Supp. 1988);<sup>10</sup> cf. *New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, 469 U.S. 325, 336 (1985) ("[t]oday's public school officials do not merely exercise authority voluntarily conferred on them by individual parents; rather, they act in furtherance of publicly mandated educational and disciplinary policies"). The importance that Pennsylvania attaches to the educational process is apparent from its very Constitution, which provides "for the maintenance

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10. 24 Pa. Stat. Ann. § 13-1317 provides:

Every teacher, vice principal and principal in the public schools shall have the right to exercise the same authority as to conduct and behavior over the pupils attending his school, during the time they are in attendance, including the time required in going to and from their homes, as the parents, guardians or persons in parental relation to such pupils may exercise over them.

and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth." Pa. Const. art. 3, § 14. Indeed, the statute permitting termination of a teacher's contract for, *inter alia*, "immorality", see 24 Pa. Stat. Ann. § 11-1122 (Purdon 1962), was construed to cover termination of a teacher who had proposed spanking two female high school students in a manner which the students perceived as sexual in nature. See *Penn-Delco School Dist. v. Urso*, 33 Pa. Commw. 501, 382 A.2d 162 (1978).

Even if there were no other Pennsylvania statutes explicitly directed to the obligation of school administrators to protect school children,<sup>11</sup> the duty owed by a school official to protect students from the tortious or criminal conduct of teachers has long been established in the common law.<sup>12</sup> See W. Keeton, *Prosser and Keeton on the Law of Torts*, § 56, at 383 (5th ed. 1984); see, e.g., *Wagenblast v. Odessa School District*, 110 Wash.2d 845, 758 P.2d 968 (1988) (public school may not condition participation in interscholastic athletics on students releasing school district from all potential negligence claims because, *inter alia*, "school district owes a duty to its students to employ ordinary care and to anticipate reasonably foreseeable dangers so as to take precautions for

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11. A Pennsylvania statute effective January 1, 1986 provides that prospective school employees who have direct contact with children may not be hired if they have been convicted of, *inter alia*, statutory rape, indecent assault, sexual abuse of children, and corruption of minors within the preceding five years. 24 Pa. Stat. Ann. § 1-111 (Purdon Supp. 1988).

12. Although a state law duty is not equivalent to a constitutional duty, see *Archie v. City of Racine*, 847 F.2d 1211, 1216-19 (7th Cir. 1988), that body of law may be instructive as to the duty owed. See, e.g., *Doe v. New York City Dep't of Social Services*, 649 F.2d at 145-46.

protecting the children in its custody from such dangers"); *Doe v. Durtschi*, 110 Idaho 466, 716 P.2d 1238, 1243-44 (1986) (school district may be held liable for its negligence arising out of teacher's sexual assault of students); *Galli v. Kirkeby*, 398 Mich. 527, 248 N.W.2d 149, 152 (1976) (school board may be liable, under theory of respondeat superior, for principal's homosexual assaults on a student); *Schultz v. Gould Academy*, 332 A.2d 368, 370-71 (Me. 1975) (boarding school liable when intruder gains access to dormitory room and criminally assaults female student).

As embodied in the Restatement (Second) of Torts § 320 (1965), expressly made applicable to school officials in comment a,

[o]ne who is required by law to take or who voluntarily takes the custody of another under circumstances such as to deprive the other of his normal power of self-protection or to subject him to association with persons likely to harm him, is under a duty to exercise reasonable care so to control the conduct of third persons as to prevent them from intentionally harming the other or so conducting themselves as to create an unreasonable risk of harm to him, if the actor

(a) knows or has reason to know that he has the ability to control the conduct of the third persons, and

(b) knows or should know of the necessity and opportunity for exercising such control.

See also *id.* § 315 (duty may arise where "(a) a special relation exists between the actor and the third person which imposes a duty upon the actor to control the third party's conduct, or (b) a special relation exists between the actor and the other which gives the other a right to protection").

While Pennsylvania school officials, like its other government officials, enjoy a broad statutory immunity,<sup>13</sup> the fact that defendants may be immune under state law does not detract from the existence of a common law duty, nor does it alter their potential liability under section 1983. See *Wade v. City of Pittsburgh*, 765 F.2d 405, 407-08 (3d Cir. 1985).

There is thus an adequate basis from the Pennsylvania child abuse reporting and *in loco parentis* statutes, coupled with the broad common law duty owed by school officials to students, to conclude there was a desire on the part of the state to provide affirmative protection to students.

It follows that if, as we must assume from the complaint, the defendants knew, or should have known, at least as early as 1979 from the Grove incident, of Wright's sexual misconduct with a female band student, they were on notice that female band members faced a "special danger." See *Martinez*, 444 U.S. at 285. In these circumstances, defendant school officials had a constitutional duty to investigate and take reasonable steps to protect the students. Defendants stated at oral argument that they had a duty to investigate the complaints but not a duty to protect the students. The distinction is meaningless.

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13. See 42 Pa. Cons. Stat. Ann. §§ 8541, 8542 (Purdon 1982). See generally Note, *Judicial Clarification of a Common Law Doctrine: the Pennsylvania Doctrine of Official Immunity*, 84 Dick. L. Rev. 473 (1980). Pennsylvania courts interpret the immunity statute broadly, and the exceptions thereto narrowly. See *City of Philadelphia v. Love*, 98 Pa. Commw. 138, 509 A.2d 1388 (1986), *appeal granted*, 514 Pa. 644, 523 A.2d 1132 (1987); see also *Scott v. Willis*, 543 A.2d 165 (Pa. Commw. Ct. 1988) (affirming dismissal of plaintiff's complaint against school officials arising out of their failure to protect young school children from teacher's sexual assault on grounds that plaintiff failed to plead sufficient factual or legal predicate to establish willful misconduct exception to governmental immunity, 42 Pa. Cons. Stat. Ann. § 8550 (Purdon 1982)).

because the duty to investigate must also encompass some duty to act based on the results of the investigation.

Even if we were to accept defendants' argument, which is unsupported by any court decision, that state officials have the affirmative duty to protect individuals "only in situations where individuals are helpless to protect themselves from harm and government officials in a position to prevent this harm are made aware of or have actually caused the individuals to be in a position where they are helpless to protect themselves," Appellant's Brief at 19, the allegations of the complaint satisfy this standard. Surely impressionable teenagers faced with sexual harassment by a school authority figure cannot be deemed the emotional equivalents of independent adults.

Defendants state that "the right asserted by [Stoneking] was not established in 1979 by clearly established law," Appellant's Brief at 11, but limit their argument on this issue to their contention that their response to the 1979 allegations was objectively appropriate. Even though they never expressly argue that many of the section 1983 cases which have expounded upon the special relationship which gives rise to a duty to protect from harm by third parties had not been decided in 1979, when defendants were put on notice of Wright's activities, *compare Jensen*, 747 F.2d at 194-95 (constitutional right of affirmative protection not clearly established until after 1980), we consider that argument and reject it.

We do so relying not only on section 1983 cases,<sup>14</sup> but also on the entrenched common law duty owed by a

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14. There was substantial authority by 1979 that state officials have a duty to protect institutionalized persons from self-injury or assault by fellow inmates and staff, *see, e.g., Goodman v. Parwatikar*, 570 F.2d 801, 804 (8th Cir. 1978); *Spence v. Staras*,

school official to protect students from attacks by teachers. Furthermore, after *Ingraham v. Wright* was decided in 1977, every reasonable school official should have known that it was a breach of this duty knowingly to stand by and take no action to protect a student from a beating administered by a faculty member. Since, as we noted above, sexual abuse is at least as traumatic as physical abuse, it is implausible that by 1979 reasonable school officials would not have known that there was a duty to take some affirmative action to investigate and protect students from a teacher's sexual abuse of which they were made aware, and to take steps to eliminate rather than condone an atmosphere in which teachers could sexually harass students with impunity.

Finally, defendants argue that we cannot sustain the district court's order denying their defense of qualified immunity unless we find their direction to Wright in 1979 to avoid one-on-one contact with female students was objectively inadequate. We cannot reach this issue at this stage of the litigation because it goes

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507 F.2d 554, 557 (7th Cir. 1974), and holding that a prisoner has a constitutional right to a safe environment and that the prison officials have a corresponding duty to reasonably insure that safe environment to prisoners, *see, e.g.*, *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 103-04 (1976) (obligation to provide medical treatment); *Stokes v. Delcambre*, 710 F.2d 1120 (5th Cir. 1983) (pretrial detainee's right to be protected from another inmate's physical and sexual abuse clear as of at least 1979); *see also* *Davis v. Zahradnick*, 600 F.2d 458 (4th Cir. 1979) (prisoner's right to be protected from beating by guard). Further, Stoneking did not graduate until 1983, by which time the legal principles were even more clearly established. *See* *Youngberg v. Romeo*, 457 U.S. 307 (1982); *cf.* *Bowers v. DeVito*, 686 F.2d 616, 618 (7th Cir. 1982) (even in non-custodial situations, "if the state puts the man in a position of danger from private persons and then fails to protect him, it will not be heard to say that its role was merely passive; it is as much as active tortfeasor as if it had thrown him into a snake pit.")

to the merits of the plaintiffs section 1983 claim. It is thus akin to the "I didn't do it" defense which is not cognizable at this stage. See *Chinchello*, 805 F.2d at 131.

The ruling in *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511 (1985), that denial of qualified immunity claims will be immediately appealable has imposed on the courts of appeals the responsibility of drawing the elusive line between the existence of a "clearly established" right and the question whether the conduct at issue violated that right. In this case, there is an expert affidavit countering defendants' bald contention that their response to the allegations of misconduct fell within the parameters of their reasonable professional judgment.<sup>15</sup> This creates a fact issue which must be determined by the factfinder. We express no view either as to whether defendants' conduct rose to the level actionable under section 1983, see *Colburn v. Upper Darby Twp.*, 838 F.2d 663, 667-70 (3d Cir. 1988), or as to the reasonableness of defendants' conduct in this case.

### III.

#### Conclusion

For the reasons expressed herein, we will affirm the order of the district court denying defendants summary judgment on qualified immunity grounds and remand for further proceedings consistent with this opinion.

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15. In *Youngberg*, 457 U.S. at 323 (footnote omitted), the Court held there would be liability only if defendants' conduct was "such a substantial departure from accepted professional judgment, practice, or standards as to demonstrate that [they] actually did not base the decision on such a judgment."

STAPLETON, *Circuit Judge*, dissenting.

A school teacher, school administrator, or anyone else acting under color of state law clearly violates the Constitution if he or she sexually abuses a student. That principle is not helpful here, however, because this suit does not involve a claim against Wright. Accordingly, the court's opinion attempts to establish that school officials owe a "constitutional duty to investigate" any complaint regarding conduct, presumably by anyone, that might possibly pose a threat to the "personal bodily integrity" of school children within their jurisdiction and a resulting constitutional duty to protect from harm any child whom that investigation might have disclosed to be at risk. While I have substantial reservations about the soundness of this legal conclusion, this appeal provides no occasion to embrace or reject it. The appellants are entitled to immunity unless it should have been readily apparent to them based on the previously decided cases that their failure to do more about the 1979 complaint concerning Wright would violate the constitutional rights of one in Stoneking's position. The court has found no case from which its "constitutional duty to investigate" is "readily apparent" and that should be the end of the matter. Even assuming that the court's analysis is ultimately determined to have merit, the Supreme Court has made it crystal clear that public officials must not be required to predict the advance of constitutional law at their peril.

We have held that a state official has an affirmative duty to protect another from third parties if, but only if, a "special relationship" exists between the two. We have found such a relationship between employees of a state social services agency and a child placed by the agency whom the employees know to be in jeopardy. *Estate of Bailey by Oare v. County of York*, 768 F.2d

503 (3d Cir. 1985). While the Supreme Court has not yet put its imprimatur on the "special relationship" doctrine, a number of other Courts of Appeals have embraced it and, for present purposes, we may accept it, *arguendo*, as clearly established law. See, e.g., *Jensen v. Conrad*, 747 F.2d 185, 193-95 (4th Cir. 1984) (reviewing prior caselaw on "special relationship" doctrine and stating guidelines for "special relationship" analysis, but holding defendant state and county social services agency officials entitled to immunity from suit alleging failure to protect abused children because the law as it affected them was not clearly established at the time of the alleged wrongdoing), *cert. denied* 470 U.S. 1052 (1985); *Taylor v. Ledbetter*, 818 F.2d 791, 797-98 (11th Cir. 1987) (*in banc*) (analogizing to prison context, finding that a special relationship exists between state foster care agency officials and foster children); cf. *DeShaney v. Winnebago County Dep't of Social Services*, 812 F.2d 298, 303 (7th Cir. 1987) (recognizing special relationship in prison context, but finding "no basis in the language of the due process clauses or the principles of constitutional law for a general doctrine of 'special relationship'"), *cert. granted* 108 S. Ct. 1218 (1988); *Harpole v. Arkansas Dep't of Human Services*, 820 F.2d 923, 926 (8th Cir. 1987) (agreeing with Seventh Circuit that special relationship concept is applicable only in prison or prison-like environments). Neither this court nor any other federal court of appeals has held, however, that a special relationship exists between a school administrator and students within his or her jurisdiction.

The court's argument for finding a special relationship is quite properly based on analogy. The analogies employed, however, are not sufficiently close to the situation before us to make the court's conclusion "readily apparent" to reasonable school

administrators. While school attendance is mandatory, for example, the relationship between a superintendent of a public school district and high school students within the district is clearly distinguishable from that between a social worker and her five-year old ward or that between a jailer and his incarcerated charge. Indeed, the differences between the warden-prisoner relationship and the relationship of school officials to schoolchildren were recognized by the Supreme Court in *Ingraham v. Wright*:

The prisoner and the schoolchild stand in wholly different circumstances. . . .

The schoolchild has little need for the protection of the Eighth Amendment. Though attendance may not always be voluntary, the public school remains an open institution. Except perhaps when very young, the child is not physically restrained from leaving school during the school hours; and at the end of the school day, the child is invariably free to return home. Even while at school, the child brings with him the support of family and friends and is rarely apart from teachers and other pupils who may witness and protest any instances of mistreatment.

The openness of the public school and its supervision by the community afford significant safeguards against the kinds of abuses from which the Eighth Amendment protects the prisoner.

430 U.S. 651, 670 (1976). The same characteristics distinguish the situation of the schoolchild from that of the foster child. As the Eleventh Circuit said in *Taylor v. Ledbetter*, in the course of finding an analogy between the situation of a foster child and that of a prisoner,

*Ingraham v. Wright* . . . is not a bar to this holding. . . . In *Ingraham*, the Court discussed the cost of providing additional benefits and safeguards to school children threatened with punishment. It found the cost of benefits and additional safeguards high and the risk of harm to school children low. In the foster home setting, recent events lead us to believe that the risk of harm to children is high. . . . Children in foster homes, unlike children in public schools, are isolated; no persons outside the home setting are present to witness and report mistreatment. The children are helpless. Without the investigation, supervision, and constant contact required by statute, a child placed in a foster home is at the mercy of the foster parents.

818 F.2d at 797.

Because of these distinctions, I would be reluctant to deny immunity to these defendants even if the plaintiff were Ms. Grove and Wright's assault on her had followed her complaint about him. We need not decide that issue, however. It is one thing to hold that a public school administrator has a duty to protect a particular student within his or her jurisdiction whom he or she knows to be in particular jeopardy. It is another to hold that there is an affirmative duty to protect an individual in a position like that of Stoneking, whom the administrator had no reason to believe was any more at risk from sexually aggressive teachers than her female classmates.<sup>1</sup> The court points

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1. To say, as does the court, that Stoneking "was a member of a known and identifiable class of potential victims -- female students in general, and female band members in particular" serves neither to cabin the newly-created liability nor to bring this case within the scope of a precedent of which these school administrators should have known.

to nothing that should have made the leap between these two propositions apparent to these school administrators. Indeed, authorities relied upon by the court suggest that there is no duty to protect in the absence of notice that a particular individual is in peril. In *Jensen v. Conrad*, for example, the court described its prior caselaw on special relationships as having held such relationships existed "with respect to inmates in the state's prisons or patients in its mental institutions *whom the state knows to be under specific risk of harm* from themselves or others in the state's custody or subject to its effective control." 747 F.2d at 193 (emphasis supplied). And in *Estate of Bailey*, we held that a special relationship and concomitant affirmative constitutional duty arises where a state social services agency is aware that a *particular child* has been abused. See also *Wood v. Ostrander*, No. 87-3924, slip op. at 8551-56 (9th Cir. July 13, 1988) (holding that a police officer was not entitled to qualified immunity where he had arrested Wood's male companion, taken the car keys, and left Wood stranded in a high-crime area five miles from her home at 2:30 a.m., and reasonably should have been aware of the danger to Wood); *White v. Rochford*, 592 F.2d 381, 383-86 (7th Cir. 1979) (holding that police officers were not entitled to qualified immunity where they had arrested the uncle of three minor children, leaving the children stranded in the car on a busy eight-lane expressway, and could not have avoided knowing of the danger to the children).

Because the court here holds the defendant officials personally liable in damages for the commission of a constitutional tort that is established as such only by the opinion in this case, I respectfully dissent.

A True Copy:

Teste:

*Clerk of the United States Court of Appeals  
for the Third Circuit*

**H. Order of Supreme Court of the United  
States, No. 88-802, March 6, 1989**

*Smith v. Stoneking*



SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES  
OFFICE OF THE CLERK  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20543

March 6, 1989

Mr. Kenneth D. Chestek  
Murphy, Taylor, et al.  
518 State Street  
Erie, PA 16501

Re: Frederick Smith, etc., et al.,  
v. Kathleen Stoneking  
No. 88-802

Dear Mr. Chestek:

The Court today entered the following order in the above entitled case:

The motion of petitioners to consolidate this case with No. 88-1350, *Smith v. Sowers*, is denied. The petition for a writ of certiorari is granted. The judgment is vacated and the case is remanded to the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit for further consideration in light of *DeShaney v. Winnebago County Department of Social Services*, 489 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (1989).

Very truly yours,

/s/ Joseph F. Spaniol, Jr.,  
Clerk



**I. Opinion and Order, U.S. District for Western  
District of Pennsylvania, No. 88-57 E., August 29,  
1988, reported at 694 F.Supp. 125**

*Sowers v. Bradford Area School District, et al.*



**JUDY GROVE SOWERS,**

*Plaintiff,*

v.

**BRADFORD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT;**  
**FREDERICK SMITH,** in his individual and  
official capacity as Principal of the  
Bradford Area High School; **RICHARD MILLER,**  
in his individual and official capacity as  
Assistant Principal of the Bradford Area High  
School; and **FREDERICK SHUEY,** in his  
individual and official capacity as Superintendent  
of the Bradford Area School District,

*Defendants*

Civil Action No. 88-57 Erie

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

694 F. Supp. 125; 1988 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 9613

August 29, 1988

GLEN E. MENCER, UNITED STATES DISTRICT  
JUDGE

**OPINION**

This is a civil rights action brought under 42 U.S.C.  
§ 1983 [§ 1983] by a former Bradford high school student,

Judy Grove Sowers, against the Bradford Area School District ["school district"], the school district's superintendent, Frederick Shuey, and the high school's principal and assistant principal, Frederick Smith and Richard Miller. This is the third suit filed against these same defendants by former female students. This case centers on a June 16, 1979 sexual assault upon the plaintiff, then a high school student and member of the marching band by the band director, Edward Wright.

Count I of the complaint is against the school district and alleges that there existed a pernicious practice, custom and/or policy, prior and subsequent to the assault by Wright, of reckless indifference to and/or active concealment of instances of known or suspected sexual abuse of students by teachers. It further alleges that this created a climate wherein child abusers, such as Wright, could prey upon female students with impunity. The complaint alleges that the School District's conduct was a proximate cause of a deprivation of the plaintiff's constitutional rights to freedom from sexual abuse and free access to the courts unimpeded by threats, coercion or intimidation, as well as severe mental anguish, embarrassment, humiliation and emotional distress.

Count II alleges that the individual defendants were members of a conspiracy whose purpose was to conceal from the public instances of known and/or suspected sexual abuse of students by various teachers. The alleged overt acts in furtherance of the conspiracy included, *inter alia*,

the alleged co-conspirators\* failure to respond appropriately to the complaints of sexual abuse and defendant Smith's keeping of a personal, secret file in his desk drawer at home memorializing many of the complaints against teachers, as well as the explicit or tacit agreement of each of the alleged co-conspirators. The alleged proximate results of the conspiracy are the same as those under Count I.

### FACTS

At the heart of this suit is the allegation that on June 16, 1979, Sowers,<sup>28</sup> a member of the school marching band, was sexually molested by Edward Wright, the band director.<sup>29</sup> Wright had been hired by the school district in 1976, with responsibility to supervise band activities and provide music lessons to students. Prior to 1976, Wright had been the band director in the Jasper School District, where the complaint alleges he "had attempted to sexually molest and/or harass various female students." Complaint at par. 20. The complaint alleges that the defendants had been on notice of Wright's proclivities with respect to female students prior to the June, 1979 assault, although the complaint does not detail how it was that they had been put on such notice. Complaint at par. 26(c).

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<sup>28</sup> At the time of the assault, the plaintiff's name was Judy Grove. This action is brought under the name Sowers, the plaintiff's married name. We will refer to her by that name as well.

<sup>29</sup> On November 6, 1986, Edward Wright plead guilty to a ten count criminal indictment which included four counts of indecent assault.

Sower's complaint asserts that Wright's assault on her was just one in a series of incidents in which the defendants, although informed by female students of sexual abuse by teachers, took no action except to conceal the problem. The complaint alleges that prior to the June 16, 1979 assault, during the 1977-78 school year, a female senior informed defendants Smith and Miller that a history teacher (and coach of the girls' tennis team) had made improper sexual advances toward her in a classroom. Complaint at par. 26(a). Smith and Miller told her not to tell her parents about the incident, and no disciplinary action was pursued against the faculty member. *Id.* In 1978 and periodically thereafter, Smith, Miller and school district superintendent Shuey were alleged to have received other complaints of sexually abusive language and/or improper sexual advances by a shop teacher. Complaint at par. 26(b). The defendants allegedly pursued no disciplinary action against the shop teacher. *Id.*

Edward Wright's sexual assault on Judy Grove Sower's occurred on June 16, 1979. According to her deposition, she went to Wright's house to obtain a tape of marching music. Sowers was a section leader and had to learn the music for summer band practice. She was going away the next day for two weeks, therefore she had to obtain the tape so she could learn the music prior to the commencement of summer band practice. Sowers Deposition at 16. She reported the assault to Gene Dillard, a youth counselor visiting the school at the invitation of the school administration. Complaint at par. 13. Dillard

informed Smith and Miller, as well as a school guidance counselor, of the sexual abuse and harassment by Wright. He told them he considered her reports to be truthful. *Id.* at par. 14. Soon thereafter, Sowers met with Smith and Miller and personally informed them of the sexual assault by Wright. Other meetings were held during the fall and early winter between Sowers, Smith and Miller. *Id.* at par. 15. The plaintiff alleges that Smith and Miller actively discouraged her from pursuing her remedies in court against Wright "through intimidation, threats and coercion," and indicated that they did not believe her. *Id.* at par. 16. In January 1980, Smith told Sowers that if she wanted to remain in the school marching band she would have to publicly apologize for having accused Wright of the sexual assault. *Id.* at par. 17. When Smith had assembled the band members, Sowers did not apologize, instead leaving the band room "in an extremely emotional state." *Id.* at par. 18.

The plaintiff's complaint goes on to list numerous instances where female students reported subsequent episodes of sexual abuse by Wright and other male teachers at the Bradford high school to the defendants. *Id.* at pars. 26(d) - (1). In none of these cases did the defendants pursue disciplinary action against the molesting male teachers beyond issuing an occasional "no one-on-one" directive. For example, in late September or early of 1984, a female band member told her guidance counselor that Wright had attempted to sexually molest her in a vehicle. *Id.* at par. 26(i). This student also told the counselor that Wright was currently molesting another student and had

- molested yet another student who had graduated. *Id.* The accusation was relayed to defendants Smith and Shuey. On December 15, 1984, Smith met with Wright and issued another "no one-on-one" directive, but informed Wright that no one accused him of any wrongdoing." *Id.* at par. 26(j). The plaintiff also alleges that Smith maintained a personal, secret file in his desk drawer at home, memorializing many of the complaints. *Id.* at par. 37. The school administration's alleged toleration of Wright's abuse of female students came to an end in March of 1986 when fresh allegations brought about meetings between school administrators and parents of children who had been assaulted by Wright. Wright was suspended as of March 10, 1986, and later resigned.

## DISCUSSION

### I. Defendants' Motion to Strike Portions of the Complaint

The defendants' move to strike portions of paragraphs 25 and 26 of the complaint, as well as all of paragraph 20. They assert that paragraphs 25 and 26 "contain immaterial, impertinent and scandalous matters, consisting of allegations of conduct involving teachers other than Plaintiff, students other than Plaintiff, and conduct subsequent to the alleged injury to Plaintiff, all of which has no bearing in any way on the alleged injury to this Plaintiff." Defendants Motion to Dismiss and/or Strike, p. 2. Paragraph 25 mentions no teachers or students at all, thus we

do not understand the defendants' reason for striking it, and we will not do so. Paragraph 26 indeed refers to teachers other than Wright, and students other than the plaintiff (albeit these students are referred to by initials, not by name). Because the plaintiff's case depends upon establishing a policy or custom which was adhered to in response to numerous allegations of child abuse by various teachers at the school district, such allegations are relevant to her case. While we agree with the defendants that the conduct described in these allegations could be viewed as scandalous, we do not agree that they are immaterial or impertinent, and we will deny their motion to strike.

## II. Defendants' Motion to Dismiss the Complaint

The defendants offer a number of grounds for dismissal of the Sowers complaint against them, allegations the defendants scorn as "impertinent"<sup>30</sup> Defendants' Brief in Support at 2; *see also* Defendants' Motion to Dismiss and/or Strike, p. 2. Defendants argue that the complaint fails to state a claim under § 1983 and that the action is barred by the two-year statute of limitations.

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<sup>30</sup> It is unclear whether the defendants intend the word "impertinent" in the sense of "presumptuous, rude, uncivil," or "not pertinent, irrelevant." *See Random House Collegiate Dictionary*, revised ed. 1980, p. 667. If true, the plaintiff's allegations are anything but impertinent, in either sense of the word.

In order to properly decide the motion to dismiss, it is necessary to analyze the required elements of a cause of action under § 1983, as well as the questions surrounding the limitations period. An analysis of the most salient issues begins with the question of whether the plaintiff's complaint alleges a deprivation of a constitutional right "under color of law. In cases such as this where a plaintiff alleges that the defendants' policy or custom resulted in the failure to carry out an alleged duty to protect the plaintiff, a court must find a "special relationship" between the plaintiff and the state body or official creating a duty to protect. In addition, where a claim is based upon a failure to act by the defendants, a court must consider whether that failure to act: (1) was a substantial factor leading to a violation of a constitutionally protected liberty or property interest; and (2) displayed "deliberate indifference" or "gross negligence" with regard to that violation.

#### A. Standard for Deciding a Motion to Dismiss

A motion to dismiss tests the formal sufficiency of the statement of the claim for relief, addressing itself solely to the failure of the complaint to state a claim for relief. Wright & Miller, *Federal Practice And Procedure* § 1356 (1987 Supp.). To merit dismissal, the plaintiff's pleading must fail to meet the liberal requirements for pleading a claim set forth in Rule 8(a), which calls for "a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief." *Id.*; Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(b). For purposes of the motion to dismiss, the complaint is construed in the

light most favorable to the plaintiff and its allegations taken as true. *Id.* at § 1357. In general, a court has broad discretion in ruling on a motion to dismiss, but dismissal should only be granted with care in order to avoid improperly denying plaintiff the opportunity to have her claim adjudicated on the merits. *Id.* "The issue is not whether a plaintiff will ultimately prevail but whether the claimant is entitled to offer evidence to support his claims." *Estate of Bailey By Oare v. County of York*, 768 F.2d 503 (3d Cir. 1985) (quoting *Scheuer v. Rhodes*, 416 U.S. 232, 236, 94 S.Ct. 1683, 1686, 40 L.Ed.2d 90 (1974)).

B. Deprivation of a Constitutional Right "Under Color of State Law"

To state a claim under § 1983 an individual must allege facts constituting a deprivation of a constitutional right under color of state law. An official's actions are not removed from under color of state law merely because the official acted beyond the scope of the authority granted by state law. Misuse of power, possessed by virtue of state law and made possible only because the wrongdoer is clothed with the authority of state law, is taken "under color of" state law. *United States v. Classic*, 313 U.S. 299, 326, 61 S.Ct. 1031, 1043, 85 L.Ed. 1368 (1941); *Doe "A" v. Special School Dist. of St. Louis Co.*, 637 F. Supp. 1138, 1142 (E.D. Mo. 1986); accord *Monroe v. Pape*, 365 U.S. 167, 81 S.Ct. 473, 5 L.Ed.2d 492 (1961). The plaintiff's complaint alleges that there existed a practice, custom and/or policy which

caused the deprivation of her constitutional rights. "[I]t is when execution of a government's policy or custom, whether made by its lawmakers or by those whose edicts or acts may fairly be said to represent official policy, inflicts the injury that the government as an entity is responsible under § 1983." *Monell v. New York City Dept. of Soc. Serv.*, 436 U.S. 658, 694, 98 S.Ct. 2018, 2037, 56 L.Ed.2d 611, 638 (1978); see also *Estate of Bailey by Oare v. County of York*, 768 F.2d 503, 506 (3d Cir. 1985). "In an appropriate case, even in the absence of formal agency conduct, an 'official policy' may be inferred 'from informal acts or omissions of supervisory municipal officials.'" *Estate of Bailey by Oare*, 768 F.2d at 506 (quoting *Turpin v. Mailet*, 619 F.2d 196, 200 (2d Cir.), cert. denied, 449 U.S. 1016, 101 S.Ct. 577, 66 L.Ed.2d 475 (1980)). By these standards, we believe the complaint sufficiently alleges that the defendants caused a deprivation of her constitutional rights "under color of state law."<sup>31</sup>

### C. Special Relationship

In § 1983 actions such as this one where a plaintiff asserts a right of protection, courts require that there exist a "special relationship" between the plaintiff and defendant which would create a duty to protect. See *Jensen v. Conrad*, 747 F.2d 185, 194-95 (4th Cir. 1984), cert. denied, 470

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<sup>31</sup> Public officials are liable under § 1983 if the official causes an individual to be deprived of a constitutional right. *Baker v. McCollon*, 443 U.S. 137, 142, 99 S.Ct. 2689, 2693, 61 L.Ed.2d 433, 440 (1979).

U.S. 1052, 105 S.Ct. 1754, 84 L.Ed.2d 818 (1985). In *Bowers v. DeVito*, 686 F.2d 616 (7th Cir. 1982), the Seventh Circuit refused to hold the state liable for a murder committed by a schizophrenic (with a history of criminal violence) one year after being released from a state mental hospital. Judge Posner stated "there is no constitutional right to be protected by the state against being murdered by criminals or madmen." *Bowers*, 686 F.2d at 618. Judge Posner, a jurist renowned as a theorist in tort law, acknowledged that where the state is responsible for placing a person in a position of danger or potential harm, the state would owe an affirmative duty obligating the state to protect that person. Judge Posner wrote:

If the state puts a man in a position of danger from private persons and then fails to protect him, it will not be heard to say that its role was merely passive; it is as much an active tortfeasor as if it had thrown him into a snake pit. It is on this theory that state prison personnel are sometimes held liable under section 1983 for the violence of one prison inmate against another.

*Bowers*, 818 F.2d at 618. The Fourth Circuit later noted that the *Bowers* finding that the general public has no constitutional right to protection, and the state no duty to protect, from criminals and madmen, was expressly qualified by its acknowledgment that "such a right and corollary duty may arise out of *special custodial or other*

*relationships* created or assumed by the state in respect of particular persons." *Fox v. Custis*, 712 F.2d 84, 88 (4th Cir. 1983) [emphasis added]. Courts have found the "special relationship" requirement, the nexus between a plaintiff and the state necessary to an action under § 1983, to be a standard that is elusive and difficult to define.

*Estate of Bailey by Oare v. County of York* involved a county children's services agency's involvement in the tragic abuse and death of a five-year-old girl. 768 F.2d 503 (3d Cir. 1985). The girl lived with her mother and her mother's boyfriend when relatives noticed severe bruises and other evidence of abuse on the child's body. When the relatives contacted the police and the child services agency, the agency had the girl examined by a physician. The physician advised that the boyfriend be denied access to the child, and that the girl should be taken from the mother if necessary to deny the boyfriend access. The next day the county agency returned the child to the mother's custody, undertaking no independent investigation to determine what access the boyfriend might have. A month later the girl died from physical injuries inflicted on her by the boyfriend and mother. *Id.* 768 F.2d at 505. The Third Circuit found there to be a "special relationship" between the little girl and the childrens services agency and the county, noting that the plaintiff alleged that the defendants had evidence of previous abuse, was aware of the source of abuse and inadequately investigated the danger. The circuit court therefore vacated and remanded the district court's granting of the defendants' motion to dismiss. *Id.*

at 510. "When the agency knows that a child has been beaten, '[t]his strengthens the argument that some sort of special relationship has been established.'" *Id.* at 510-11 (quoting *Jensen v. Conrad*, 747 F.2d 185, 195 n. 11 (4th Cir. 1984), *cert. denied*, 470 U.S. 1052, 105 S.Ct. 1754, 84 L.Ed.2d 818 (1985) (suggests special relationship where state agency failed to intervene to prevent beatings of children by their guardians)).

The Third Circuit's "special relationship" analysis in *Estate of Bailey by Oare* highlighted two cases as examples of instances where a "duty of protection has been found owing by the state and local entities to persons who were not in custody." *Id.* at 510. The first was *White v. Rochford*, 592 F.2d 381 (7th Cir. 1979), in which the Seventh Circuit reversed the dismissal of a complaint alleging that police who had arrested the driver of a car subjected the three passenger children to a health-endangering situation by abandoning them. That court had reasoned that "the police could not avoid knowing that, absent their assistance, the three children would be subjected to cold weather and danger from traffic. This indifference in the face of known dangers certainly must constitute gross negligence." *Id.*, 592 F.2d at 385. The second example given was *Thurman v. City of Torrington*, 595 F. Supp. 1521 (D. Conn. 1984), which involved an allegation local police systematically failed to adequately protect women abused or assaulted by a spouse or boy friend. The *Thurman* court stated, "City officials and police officers are under an affirmative duty to preserve law and order, and to protect

the personal safety of persons in the community." *Id.*, 595 F. Supp. at 1527. This duty was held to require officials having notice of the possibility of attacks on women in domestic relationships "to take reasonable measures to protect the personal safety of such persons in the community." *Id.*

There is a significant, although not dispositive, distinction between the facts of *Estate of Bailey by Oare, White and Thurman* on the one hand, and the present case. In those cases, the plaintiff toward whom a special relationship and duty existed had been individuals whose specific need for state protection were identifiable prior to their injury. In the present case the vulnerability to sexual abuse due to the defendants' customs, practices and/or policies was shared by all the female students at the high school. Even if the plaintiff's allegation that the defendants had prior notice of Wright's propensity for sexual abuse is taken as true, the potentially endangered group would include, at the least, all females belonging to the marching band.<sup>32</sup>

A number of cases have found a "special relationship" to exist when an identifiable group, rather than a specific individual, was endangered. In *P.L.C. v. Housing Authority of County of Warren*, a tenant in a public housing project brought a civil rights action after she was raped

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<sup>32</sup> The Court has no information regarding the number of females in the Bradford marching band at that time.

by a county housing authority employee who entered her apartment using a housing authority key. 588 F. Supp. 961 (W.D. Pa. 1984). Her complaint alleged that the housing authority knew or should have known of the assailant's prior convictions for rape and his alcoholism when they hired him as a maintenance man. *Id.*, 588 F. Supp. at 962. In *P.L.C.*, as in the case at bar, the danger posed by the housing authority's conduct (or lack thereof) was shared by the plaintiff as a member of an identifiable group of potential victims, i.e., the female residents of the housing project. Judge Weber found "that the authority and its officials stood in a special relationship to this particular plaintiff." *Id.*, 588 F. Supp. at 965.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, in *Beck v. Kansas Univ. Psychiatry Foundation*, 580 F. Supp. 527 (D. Kansas 1984), two individuals were shot to death at the University of Kansas Medical Center emergency room by a released prisoner with a known propensity for violence against the medical center, its staff, patients and visitors. *Id.*, 580 F. Supp. at 531. Denying a motion to dismiss by the defendant Kansas Adult Authority, the state agency which released the assail-

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<sup>33</sup> Compare *Wright v. City of Ozark*, 715 F.2d 1513 (11th Cir. 1983), in which a woman raped by an unknown assailant brought a § 1983 action against the city, the mayor, the police chief and a member of the police department alleging that the defendants had deliberately suppressed information of prior rapes in a certain area of the city to avoid adverse publicity. The Eleventh Circuit found there to be no "special relationship" because the defendants had not intentionally singled her out to be denied protection from a rapist and there was no allegation that the defendants knew of the plaintiff before the rape occurred.

ant despite knowledge of his potential for violence at the medical center, the court found that the Adult Authority had a duty to take into account "the best interests of society." The court concluded that "[c]ertainly that duty includes taking into account the special danger which the inmate may have to an identifiable group or individual." *Id.*, 580 F. Supp. at 534. Thus, a special relationship was found between the state authority and an identifiable group, namely the staff, patients and visitors of the medical center. Thus, the *Beck* court concluded that the plaintiffs' complaint alleged a "special relationship" between the Kansas Adult Authority and the plaintiffs.

In the present case, the question is whether the defendants were in a "special relationship" with the endangered "identifiable group," female students (or band members) at the Bradford high school. We find that the defendants owed a duty to protect its students from sexual abuse by its teachers. We think this duty is at least as clear as those owed to the tenants in *P.L.C.*, the abused women in *Thurman*, or the visitors to the medical center in *Beck*. The people and the legislature of Pennsylvania trust their children to the care and supervision of school officials, and grant those officials in loco parentis authority over those children while they attend school.<sup>34</sup> In addition, school

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<sup>34</sup> The Pennsylvania Public School Code states that:

Every teacher, vice principal and principal in the public schools shall have the right to exercise the same authority as to conduct and behavior over the pupils attending his school.

districts are statutorily authorized to fire teachers for "immorality," which has been held to include uninvited advances by teachers toward students. 24 P.S. § 11-1122; see *Keating v. Bd. of School Directors of Riverside School District*, 513 A.2d 547, 99 Pa.Cmwlth. 337 (1986), *app. denied*, 522 A.2d 51, 514 Pa. 626 (1987). As we stated in *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School District*, "abuse of this type is not tolerated when the victim is a prison inmate or a patient in a state hospital. Clearly then, the constitution must offer school children similar protections." 667 F. Supp. at 1095 [citations omitted]. We find that a "special relationship," with an accompanying duty to protect, exists between a student and her school district, school district superintendent, principal and vice principal.

The defendants raise the factual distinction that this assault took place off school grounds at the teacher's home, at the beginning of summer vacation. The defendants argue that "in no sense of the word could any 'special relationship' exist at the time of this alleged assault." Defendants' Brief in Support, p. 17 n. 7. Under the facts of this case, we do not agree. The increased threat to female students created by the defendants' alleged tolerance for sexual abuse was not the sort of danger that

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during the time they are in attendance, including the time required in going to and from their homes, as the parents, guardians or persons in parental relation to such pupils may exercise over them.

24 P.S. § 13-1317 (1988 P.P.).

disappeared when those students packed up their instruments and walked out of the band room. Because Wright conducted marching band practices during the summer months, his opportunity to abuse his female band students, opportunity he possessed by virtue of his position as a teacher and director of the band, did not disappear when the school bell sounded the end of day or the beginning of vacation-time. Presumably it would have made little difference if the maintenance man in *P.L.C. v. Housing Authority of the County of Warren* had been off-duty, or on vacation, when he used his housing authority key to enter the rape victim's apartment. Similarly, it is irrelevant to this Court in determining the existence of a "special relationship," whether Sowers was assaulted while she was picking up a marching band tape for band practice to be held during the school year or during the summer months. The timing and circumstances of the assault may or may not be relevant to the factual determination of causation of Sowers' injury, but, as we will discuss later in this decision, the question of proximate cause requires factual development and is therefore inappropriate to decide on a motion to dismiss.

#### D. Requirements for Liability Under § 1983 For A Failure To Act

The defendants are alleged to have fostered a practice, custom and/or policy of reckless indifference and/or active concealment of instances of known or suspected

sexual abuse. The complaint alleges that this practice, custom and/or policy was the result of both overt activity and failures to act on the part of the defendants. Government officials may be held liable under § 1983 for a failure to do what is required as well as for overt activity which is unlawful and harmful. See *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 97 S.Ct. 285, 50 L.Ed.2d 251 (1976); *Doe v. New York City Dept. of Social Services*, 649 F.2d 134, 141 (2d Cir. 1981) [Doe I]; *Duchesne v. Sugarman*, 566 F.2d 817, 822 (2d Cir. 1977) ("where conduct of the supervisory authority is directly related to a denial of a constitutional right, it is not to be distinguished as a matter of causation, upon "whether it was action or inaction"). For a § 1983 cause of action to arise where an official is charged with failing to exercise an affirmative duty, the failure to act must have been a substantial factor leading to the violation of a *constitutionally protected liberty or property interest*. *Rizzo v. Goode*, 423 U.S. 362, 96 S.Ct. 598, 46 L.Ed.2d 561 (1976). The official having the responsibility to act must also have displayed "*deliberate indifference*" or "*gross negligence*." *Turpin v. Mailet*, 619 F.2d 196 (2d Cir.), *cert. denied sub nom. Turpin v. West Haven*, 449 U.S. 1016, 101 S.Ct. 577, 66 L.Ed.2d 475 (1980) ("deliberate indifference" standard); *Doe v. New York City Dept. of Social Services*, 709 F.2d 782, 789-790 (2d Cir. 1983) [Doe II], *cert. denied sub nom. Catholic Home Bureau v. Doe*, 464 U.S. 864, 104 S.Ct. 196, 78 L.Ed.2d 171 (1983) ("gross negligence" standard) (citing *Youngberg v. Romeo*, 457 U.S. 307, \_\_\_, 102 S.Ct. 2452, 2462, 73 L.Ed.2d 28 (1982)). As our reasoning below will explain, we believe that these two re-

quirements, an alleged violation of a protected liberty interest and an alleged display of "deliberate indifference" or "gross negligence," are met in the plaintiff's complaint.

1. Violation of a Liberty Interest: Substantive Due Process

The first of the two requirements for a § 1983 claim for a failure to act is that the failure to act must have been a *substantial factor* leading to the violation of a constitutionally protected liberty or property interest. As to whether the plaintiff has alleged that the defendants' failures to act amounted to a substantial factor leading to the constitutional violation, we believe the complaint does so allege. Furthermore, as we will explain later in the statute of limitations section of this opinion, the question of causation is not amenable to determination on the basis of pleadings alone. We will therefore move on to the question of whether the plaintiff has properly alleged a constitutionally protected liberty interest.

The liberty interest which the plaintiff alleges was deprived her was a substantive due process right to be free from sexual abuse. Substantive due process rights are significantly different from procedural due process rights. Procedural due process involves expectations created by state law. As to these rights, the state may take them away by affording pre-deprivation hearings, post-deprivation hearings or other safeguards. Substantive due process, on the other hand, is concerned with rights such as those

listed in the Bill of Rights and those rights held to be so fundamental that a state may not take them away regardless of the fairness of the procedures used to do so. *Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327, 331, 106 S.Ct. 662, 663, 88 L.Ed.2d 662, 668 (1986). Justice Frankfurter noted that the scope of due process protection is not subject to precise definition:

Due process of law is a summarized constitutional guarantee of respect for those personal immunities which, as Mr. Justice Cardozo twice wrote for the Court, are so rooted in the traditions and conscience of our people as to be ranked as fundamental, *Snyder v. Massachusetts*, 291 U.S. 97, 105 [54 S.Ct. 330, 332, 78 L.Ed.2d 674], or are implicit in the concept of ordered liberty. *Palko v. Connecticut*, 302 U.S. 319, 325 [58 S.Ct. 149, 152, 82 L.Ed.2d 288].

*Rochin v. California*, 342 U.S. 165, 169, 72 S.Ct. 205, 208, 96 L.Ed.2d 183 (1952). Due process "is a rational continuum which, broadly speaking, includes a freedom from all substantial arbitrary impositions and purposeless restraints." *Poe v. Ullman*, 367 U.S. 497, 543, 81 S.Ct. 1752, 1777, 6 L.Ed.2d 989 (1961) (Harlan, J., dissenting). "The content of substantive due process must be determined in each case through disinterested inquiry and by judgment not ad hoc and episodic but duly mindful of reconciling the needs of both continuity and of change in a progressive society." *Doe "A" v. Special School District of St. Louis*

~~County~~, 637 F. Supp. 1138, 1144 (E.D. Mo. 1986) (citing *Rochin v. California*, 342 U.S. at 172, 72 S.Ct. at 209.)

Courts have recognized that substantive due process includes the right to be free from state intrusions into personal privacy and bodily security.<sup>35</sup> Illustrative of the substantive due process rights of students is a recent Missouri case, *Doe "A" v. Special School District of St. Louis Co.*, 637 F. Supp. 1138 (E.D. Mo. 1986). That action concerned nine handicapped children who had repeatedly been beaten and sexually abused over the course of a year and a half by a school bus driver while they were passengers aboard his bus. Claims were brought under § 1983

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<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., *Ingraham v. Wright*, 430 U.S. 651, 673-74, 97 S.Ct. 1401, \_\_\_, 51 L.Ed.2d 711, 731-732 (1977) (corporal punishment of students by teachers, substantive due process right to personal security); *Rochin v. California*, 342 U.S. 165, 72 S.Ct. 205, 96 L.Ed. 183 (1952) (forcible use of stomach pump by police); *Taylor By And Through Walker v. Ledbetter*, 818 F.2d 791 (11th Cir. 1987) (foster child suit against state and county officials for injuries received in custody of foster parents); *Davis v. Forrest*, 768 F.2d 257, 258 (8th Cir. 1985) (two police officers' unnecessary beating plaintiff with flashlights); *Doe v. New York City Dept. of Social Services*, 649 F.2d 134, 141-145 (2d Cir. 1981) (municipality liable under § 1983 for deliberate indifference to sexual abuse of foster child by foster parent); *Hall v. Tawney*, 621 F.2d 607, 613 (4th Cir. 1980) (severe corporal punishment inflicted upon grade school student by teacher violated student's substantive due process rights); *White v. Rochford*, 592 F.2d 381 (7th Cir. 1979) (police arrest driver of car, abandoning three passenger children); *Johnson v. Glick*, 481 F.2d 1028 (2d Cir.), cert. denied 414 U.S. 1033, 94 S.Ct. 462, 38 L.Ed.2d 324 (1973) (unprovoked beating of pretrial detainee by guards); *Jenkins v. Averitt*, 424 F.2d 1228, 1231-32 (4th Cir. 1970) (reckless pistol shooting of suspect by police); *Doe "A" v. Special School District of St. Louis County*, 637 F. Supp. 1138 (E.D. Mo. 1986) (handicapped children beaten and sexually abused by school bus driver); *Thurman v. City of Torrington*, 595 F. Supp. 1521 (D. Conn. 1984) (police with notice of possibility of attacks on women in domestic relationships).

against the bus driver, the school district and twelve individual school administrators. *Id.* at 1141. Despite receiving complaints from parents, teachers and other school employees, it was alleged that the school district and school administrators: (1) failed to investigate the complaints; (2) concealed the bus driver's actions by discouraging investigation; (3) failed to develop a policy to provide training for the investigation of complaints and to screen employees for their propensity to abuse children; (4) failed to report the bus driver's conduct to law enforcement and child protective agencies despite their statutory obligations to do so. *Id.* at 1142.

When the defendants in *Doe "A"* moved to dismiss the § 1983 claims for failure to allege conduct arising under color of state law and failure to allege actions which rise to the level of constitutional violations, the district court denied the motions. The court first found that the bus driver, as a school district employee, acted under color of state law. *Id.* at 1143. After examining the legal development of substantive due process rights, the court stated that "this Court does not doubt that the constitutional rights of children to be free from harm is commensurate with the rights of adults in state custody." *Id.* at 1145. The court concluded that:

The acts of abuse alleged by plaintiffs state a substantive due process claim. The acts intrude upon the personal privacy and bodily integrity of these children. The acts intrude in ways

more personal and private than a jailhouse beating and in ways which will surely leave psychological scars long after physical healing is complete. . . . The alleged acts of [the bus driver] and the alleged tolerance of these acts by [the school district] and the individual defendants pass beyond the pale of common law torts. They shock the conscience of this Court.

*Doe "A"*, 637 F. Supp. at 1145.

In *Hall v. Tawney*, a case involving the infliction of severe corporal punishment on grade school students, the Fourth Circuit explained the substantive due process right at issue as:

the right to be free of state intrusions into the realms of personal privacy and bodily security through means so brutal, demeaning, and harmful as literally to shock the conscience of a court. The existence of this right to ultimate bodily security - the most fundamental aspect of personal privacy - is unmistakably established in our constitutional decisions as an attribute of the ordered liberty that is the concern of substantive due process. Numerous cases in a variety of contexts recognize it as a last line of defense against those literally outrageous abuses of official power whose very

variety makes formulation of a more precise standard impossible.

*Hall v. Tawney*, 621 F.2d 607, 613 (4th Cir. 1980) (citations omitted). The court explained that it "simply do not see how" it could fail to uphold the right in "public school children under the disciplinary control of public school teachers" when the right was upheld in persons charged with or suspected of crime and in the custody of police officers. *Id.*

We think it apparent that the plaintiff's complaint alleges a deprivation of Sowers' right to be free from state intrusions, in this case by her teacher, into her personal privacy and bodily security. Because such a right is embraced within the scope of substantive due process, this satisfies the requirement that her complaint allege a violation of a constitutionally protected liberty interest.

2. "Deliberate Indifference" or "Gross Negligence" by Defendants

The second requirement for a § 1983 claim for a failure to act is that the official having the responsibility to act must display "deliberate indifference" or "gross negligence." The question is whether this requirement is met by the plaintiff's allegation of "reckless indifference" by the defendants. Traditionally the term "gross negligence" has been held equivalent to the words "reckless and wanton,"

see, e.g., *Jones v. Commonwealth*, 213 Ky. 356, 281 S.W. 164, 167 (1926), and the Supreme Court in *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 97 S.Ct. 285, 50 L.Ed.2d 251 (1976), has characterized deliberate indifference as "the wanton infliction of unnecessary pain." 429 U.S. at 105, 97 S.Ct. at 291. Furthermore, in *Estate of Bailey by Oare*, the Third Circuit described the burden of proof on the plaintiffs in that § 1983 action as "[permitting] the fact finder to infer deliberate or *reckless indifference* or unconcern or callous disregard for" the deceased plaintiff's safety. *Estate of Bailey by Oare*, 768 F.2d 503, 508 (3d Cir. 1985) [emphasis added]; see also *Commonwealth Bank & Trust Co., N.A. v. Russell*, 825 F.2d 12, 17 (3d Cir. 1987). We therefore conclude that the plaintiff's allegation of "reckless indifference" properly states a claim against the defendants under § 1983.

Because the plaintiff's complaint properly alleges a claim under § 1983, we will deny the defendants' motion to dismiss the complaint for failure to state a claim.

### III. Statute of Limitations and Discovery Rule for Tolling

In *Wilson v. Garcia*, 471 U.S. 261, 105 S.Ct. 1938, 85 L.Ed.2d 254 (1985), the Supreme Court ruled that the statute of limitations for § 1983 actions is the statute of limitations for the relevant state's personal injury statute. Since this § 1983 action arose within the Commonwealth, we must apply the two-year statute of limitations set forth in 42 Pa.C.S.A. § 5524(2). See *Sullivan v. City of Pittsburgh*

Pa., 811 F.2d 171 (3d Cir.), *cert. denied*, 56 U.S.L.W. 3244, 108 S.Ct. 148, 98 L.Ed.2d 104 (1987); *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School District*, 667 F. Supp. 1088, 1091 (W.D. Pa. 1987).

Federal courts have recognized a "discovery rule" for setting the date from which the two-year statute of limitation would begin to run. Courts distinguish between the date when a cause of action accrues and the tolling of a statute of limitations.<sup>36</sup> State law governs the tolling of the statute, unless state law is inconsistent with the purposes behind the civil rights acts. *Board of Regents v. Tomanio*, 446 U.S. 478, 484-86, 100 S.Ct. 1790, 1795-96, 64 L.Ed.2d 440 (1980) (§ 1983 claim).<sup>37</sup> The accrual of a civil rights action, however, is a question of federal law. *Dreary v. Three Un-named Police Officers*, 746 F.2d 185, 197 n. 16 (3d Cir. 1984); *Sandutch v. Muroski*, 684 F.2d 252, 254 (3d Cir. 1982) (per curiam) (citing *Cox v. Stanton*, 529 F.2d 47, 50 (4th Cir. 1975)); *Plain v. Flicker*, 645 F. Supp. 898, 901 (D. N.J. 1986) (claims under 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983, 1985). We consider the accrual of the cause of

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<sup>36</sup> A cause of action "accrues" when a suit may be maintained thereon, whenever one person may sue another. Black's Law Dictionary (rev. 4th ed., 1968) p. 37. The tolling of a statute of limitations essentially "stops the clock" with regard to the limitation. This includes the delay of the initial running of the limitations period, interruption of the running of the limitations period, or timely filing of the action within the statutory limitations period.

<sup>37</sup> See also *Wilson v. Garcia*, 471 U.S. 261, 269 & n. 17, 105 S.Ct. 1938, \_\_\_ & n. 17, 85 L.Ed.2d 254, 262 & n. 17; *Johnson v. Railway Express Agency, Inc.*, 421 U.S. 454, 95 S.Ct. 1716, 44 L.Ed.2d 295 (1975).

action to be the threshold statute of limitations issue because any state tolling doctrine would not come into play until the cause of action had accrued. Under federal law, a § 1983 claim accrues when the plaintiff knows or has reason to know of the injury that constitutes the basis of her action. *Id.* Federal courts have fashioned a "discovery rule" which requires that a cause of action accrues when the plaintiff becomes aware, or should have become aware, of both the fact of injury and its causal connection to the defendant, although the plaintiff need not know that the defendant's conduct is tortious or unlawful.<sup>38</sup> *United States v. Kubrick*, 444 U.S. 111, 100 S.Ct. 352, 62 L.Ed.2d 259 (1979) (discovery rule under Federal Tort Claims Act); *see also Plain v. Flicker*, 645 F. Supp. 898, 901 (D. N.J. 1986) (applying *Kubrick* rule to § 1983 action); *Hauptmann v. Wilentz*, 570 F. Supp. 351, 396 (D. N.J. 1983), *aff'd* 770 F.2d 1070 (3d Cir.), *cert. denied* 474 U.S. 1103, 106 S.Ct.

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<sup>38</sup> As this Court noted in *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School District*, 667 F. Supp. 1088 (W.D. Pa. 1987), Pennsylvania courts have also recognized a "discovery rule" exception to its statute of limitations. *Id.* at 1092 & n. 5. *See Lewey v. H.C. Frick Coke Co.*, 166 Pa. 535, 547, 31 A. 261, 263 (1895); *Bowser v. Guttendorf*, 1988 Pa. Super. LEXIS 1424, 541 A.2d 377, 380 (1988); *Anthony v. Koppers Co.*, 284 Pa. Super. 81, 425 A.2d 428 (1980), *rev'd on other grds.*, 496 Pa. 119, 436 A.2d 181 (1981) ("as the rule has developed it has become clear that its basis is not concealment by the defendant but rather the ability of the plaintiff to discover . . . [her] injury or its cause." *Id.* at 95, 425 A.2d at 436); *see also Burnside v. Abbot Laboratories*, 351 Pa. Super. 264, 292, 505 A.2d 973, 988 (1985) ("[W]here the issue involves a factual determination regarding what is a reasonable period of time for a plaintiff to discover [her] injury and its cause the determination is for the jury.").

807, 88 L.Ed.2d 922 (1986) (also applying *Kubrick* rule to § 1983 claim).<sup>39</sup>

The *Kubrick* rule's distinction between a plaintiff's knowledge of her injury and knowledge of the defendant's causal connection to the injury is illustrated by the Fifth Circuit's decision in *Lavellee v. Listi*, 611 F.2d 1129 (5th Cir. 1980). In *Lavellee*, the plaintiff alleged that on September 8, 1976 he had been arrested and then transported to a hospital where he was forced by several defendant deputy sheriffs to undergo an extraction of his spinal fluid, a procedure performed by defendant medical personnel. He was then locked in a bare, unsanitary, padded cell where his pleas for an examination for the pain in his back were first met with threats of beatings, after which he was placed in irons and locked, hands and feet, to a drain pipe, in a fetal position. *Id.* at 1130. The plaintiff alleged that he was not allowed to see a physician until February 3, 1977, nearly five months later, at which time he first discovered that his back had been permanently injured. The plaintiff filed his action for medical malpractice and civil rights

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<sup>39</sup> While it is not necessary as yet for us to decide whether the defendants actively concealed their alleged unlawful conduct, as the complaint alleges, active concealment by a defendant tolls the running of the statute until a plaintiff discovers the cause of action or discovers facts that reasonably put her on notice of it. See *Holmberg v. Armbrrecht*, 327 U.S. 392, 397, 66 S.Ct. 582, 585, 90 L.Ed.2d 743 (1946) (the equitable tolling doctrine "is read into every federal statute of limitations."); *Plain v. Flicker*, 645 F. Supp. at 902 (§ 1983 claim); *Cohen v. McAllister*, 673 F. Supp. 733, 739-740 (W.D. Pa. 1987). See also *Redenz by Redenz v. Rosenberg*, 360 Pa.Super. 430, 520 A.2d 883 (1987) (if tortfeasor actively conceals, statute of limitation tolled until injured person can overcome concealment).

(under § 1983) on January 10, 1978. Noting the one year limitations period borrowed from Louisiana law, the district court dismissed the plaintiff's civil rights and medical malpractice claims for the incidents occurring prior to January 10, 1977. The Fifth Circuit reversed and remanded the dismissal of the malpractice claim, arguing that:

If the plaintiff was unaware of the permanence of his injury, and reasonably thought that the pains in his back were the normal result of a spinal tap or were caused by the alleged assaults, he cannot be deemed to have knowledge of the factual predicate of his claim or its connection with possible malpractice by the defendants. Until he suspected, or should have suspected, that his pain was not the result of a properly-conducted spinal tap or of the alleged assaults, he lacked any factual basis on which to suspect an invasion of his legal rights.

*Lavellee v. Listi*, 611 F.2d at 1131-1132.

In *Lavellee*, as with the present case, there is a crucial, if subtle, distinction between the plaintiffs' knowledge of his or her injury and knowledge of the causal connection between the injury and a particular defendant's actions. The plaintiff in *Lavellee* certainly knew or should have known soon after his involuntary spinal tap and shackling that somehow he had been injured at the hands

of the deputy sheriffs, just as the plaintiff in the case at bar knew that she had been sexually assaulted and injured by Mr. Wright. Nonetheless, the Fifth Circuit found that the plaintiff in Lavellee could not necessarily be expected to know that his permanent back injury was also proximately caused by an improperly conducted spinal tap operation by the defendant medical personnel. Likewise, the critical question this Court now faces is whether Sowers knew or should have known that the school district, superintendent, principal and assistant principal had fostered an environment of deliberate indifference toward teacher abuse of female students which was a proximate cause of her injury.

The defendants argue that this action should be barred by the statute of limitations because: (1) defendants did not have a policy or custom of reckless indifference; (2) their conduct was not a cause of the plaintiff's injury; and (3) even if their conduct was found to be a cause of her injury, the plaintiff knew or should have known of that causal connection in late 1979 or early 1980, when school administrators pressured her to renounce her charges and publicly apologize to Wright.

The defendants direct this Court's attention to the Third Circuit's decision in *Sandutch v. Muroski*, 684 F.2d 252 (3d Cir. 1984), to recast the federal discovery rule for accrual of a cause of action as follows:

that notice of improper conduct by government officials should lead a plaintiff, by the exercise of due diligence, to the awareness that he has a cause of action against the government officials based upon a conspiracy to violate his civil rights.

Defendants' Brief in Support, p. 7. This is an inaccurate statement of the holding of *Sandutch*,<sup>40</sup> as well as of the

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<sup>40</sup> *Sandutch* was a civil rights action against state prosecutors alleging a violation and conspiracy to violate the plaintiff's constitutional rights by obtaining a false confession from an alleged co-conspirator and using it to prosecute the plaintiff, Sandutch, for arson and murder. 684 F.2d 252. The false testimony linking Sandutch to the crime was given during a preliminary hearing and was introduced at his criminal trial. After the preliminary hearing but prior to trial the alleged co-conspirator recanted, saying his statements were made under duress. Sandutch's attorney attempted to introduce the taped recantation at the criminal trial, but the court excluded it. Several years later in September, 1980 (after Sandutch had been convicted and jailed) Sandutch obtained an affidavit from the alleged co-conspirator explaining the circumstances under which the false statement was obtained. Sandutch filed his civil rights action two weeks later, arguing that he neither knew nor had reason to know of his injury until he received the September, 1980 affidavit.

The Third Circuit found that Sandutch should have known of the alleged conspiracy because:

although at that time Sandutch may not have known all the facts necessary to establish that the defendants conspired to deprive him of his right, his 1976 knowledge of the alleged falsity of [the alleged co-conspirator's] statement obtained under duress should have led, by the exercise of due diligence, to the awareness that he had a cause of action. The statute began to run then.

684 F.2d at 254. Nowhere in the *Sandutch* decision do we find any reference to the "notice of improper conduct" discovery rule represented to this Court by the defendants.

actual federal discovery rule. While the actual discovery rule delays accrual of a cause of action until a plaintiff knew or should have known of the injury and its causal connection to the defendant, the defendants' misstatement of the rule would have the cause of action accrue when the plaintiff receives "notice of improper conduct by government officials." *Id.* Defendants use this inaccurate statement of the rule to argue that Sowers' cause of action accrued at the time of her September, 1979 meeting with Smith and Miller at which she alleges the defendants engaged in "improper conduct," by attempting to intimidate, threaten and coerce her into retracting her allegations against Wright. *Id.* at 9. The defendants assert that "[s]urely the alleged overt and hostile conduct of Defendants at this meeting was sufficient, as a matter of law, to put [Sowers] on notice of the conspiracy." *Id.* However, the defendants' treatment of Sowers after the assault was not, and obviously could not have been, a cause of her assault. There is no allegation that Sowers knew of the defendants' handling of previous sex abuse complaints against teachers. Furthermore, there are many credible explanations for why observance of the defendants' conduct at the 1979 meetings might not be expected to lead her to the conclusion that there was a policy of reckless indifference (e.g., Sowers thought that the defendants simply did not believe her allegations). Merely because the plaintiff had witnessed some "improper conduct" by the defendants did not necessarily give her reason to know of an ongoing policy of reckless indifference to numerous complaints of

sexual abuse by teachers which might have been a proximate cause of her own injury.

In order for this Court to decide the statute of limitations question, we must consider the allegations of the plaintiff's complaint with relation to the "knew or *should have known* standard. As to the question of whether the plaintiff actually knew of her injury and the causal connection between her injury and the defendants' conduct, the plaintiff insists that it was not until Edward Wright's history of sexual abuse was revealed to the Bradford community in March, 1986 that she knew of the defendants alleged reckless indifference toward the problem. Bearing in mind our responsibility to construe the facts in the light most favorable to the plaintiff when ruling on a motion to dismiss, we must conclude for the purpose of this motion that it was not until March, 1986 that Sowers actually knew how the defendants' conduct was proximately caused her injury.

The more difficult question is whether or not Sowers should have known of the causes of her injury. The Third Circuit has stated that "[w]hether or when a plaintiff knows or has reason to know of the existence and cause of his or her injury will often turn on inferences drawn from disputed facts." *Van Buskirk v. Carey Canadian Mines. Ltd.*, 760 F.2d 481, 487 (3d Cir. 1985) (affirming jury finding that plaintiff knew or had reason to know of cause of asbestos-related condition more than two years prior to lawsuit). We find it significant that the plaintiff's

complaint alleges more than one incident of abuse of female students by teachers prior to Wright's June, 1979 assault upon the plaintiff, with school officials taking only minimal disciplinary action in response.<sup>41</sup> We are not sure that these alleged prior incidents will prove a formal policy or custom, but as the Third Circuit stated in *Estate of Bailey By Oare v. County of York*, 768 F.2d 503 (3d Cir. 1985), "even in the absence of formal agency conduct, an 'official policy' may be inferred 'from informal acts or omissions of supervisory municipal officials'. . . . '[t]he issue of authorization, approval or encouragement is generally one of fact, not law.'" *Id.* at 506 (citations omitted) (*quoting Turpin v. Mailet*, 619 F.2d 196, 200, 201 (2d Cir.), *cert. denied*, 449 U.S. 1016, 101 S.Ct. 577, 66 L.Ed.2d 475 (1980); *see also Owen v. City of Independence*, 445 U.S. 622, 633-34 & n. 13, 655 n. 39, 100 S.Ct. 1406-07 & n. 13, 1417 n. 39, 63 L.Ed.2d 673 (1980). We believe that the plaintiff is entitled to offer evidence to support her claim that she did not know, and should not have been expected to know, that there existed an environment of reckless indifference toward sexual abuse of female students by teachers at the Bradford Area School District.

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<sup>41</sup> We view the plaintiff's allegations concerning the defendants' handling of sexual abuse incidents prior to the Sowers episode as relevant evidence of policy or custom of deliberate indifference toward such behavior by teachers. This does not mean that this Court has decided that evidence of subsequent acts may not also tend to prove the nature of a prior conspiracy. *See, e.g., Grandstaff v. City of Borger, Tex.*, 767 F.2d 161, 171 (5th Cir.), *cert. denied* 55 U.S.L.W. 3607, 107 S.Ct. 1369, 94 L.Ed.2d 686 (1987).

We think the plaintiff is also entitled to an opportunity to engage in discovery and attempt to prove that the alleged practice, custom and/or policy of reckless indifference to students' complaints of sexual abuse of female students by male teachers was a proximate cause of her injury. The Third Circuit has stated that "[o]rdinarily, proximate cause cannot be determined on the basis of pleadings but instead requires a factual development at trial." *Estate of Bailey By Oare v. County of York*, 768 F.2d at 511 (citing *Black v. Stephens*, 662 F.2d 181, 190-91 (3d Cir. 1981), *cert. denied*, 445 U.S. 1008, 102 S.Ct. 1646, 71 L.Ed.2d 876 (1982) (jury question whether policy at issue proximately caused injury)). "Whether there is an 'affirmative link' between 'the adoption of any plan or policy express or otherwise' and the injury complained of is ordinarily an issue that requires a factual development." *Id.* at 511 (quoting *Rizzo v. Goode*, 423 U.S. 362, 371, 96 S.Ct. 598, 604, 46 L.Ed.2d 561, 569 (1976)).

We think factual development will be necessary to make a determination as to whether the defendants alleged conduct was a proximate cause of the plaintiff's injury, and if the plaintiff knew or should have known of ~~that~~ alleged causal connection between the defendants' conduct and the sexual assault upon Sowers. We will therefore deny the defendants' motion to dismiss the action as barred by the statute of limitations.

#### IV. Qualified Immunity

The individual defendants Smith, Miller and Shuey also seek dismissal on the basis that their actions were within the scope of those actions protected by the doctrine of qualified immunity.<sup>42</sup> Qualified or "good faith" immunity is an affirmative defense that recognizes that government officials are entitled to some form of immunity from suits for damages. The Supreme Court, in *Harlow v. Fitzgerald*, held that:

[G]overnment officials performing discretionary functions generally are shielded from liability for civil damages insofar as their conduct does not violate clearly established statutory or constitutional rights of a person of which a reasonable person would have known.

457 U.S. 800, 818, 102 S.Ct. 2727, 2738, 73 L.Ed.2d 396, 410 (1982). The individual defendants' eligibility for dismissal of this action under the qualified immunity doctrine turns on whether a reasonable person would have known that their conduct violated a clearly established constitutional right.

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<sup>42</sup> The defendants do not assert the qualified immunity defense on behalf of the school district, conceding that the doctrine does not apply to a municipal defendant. Defendants' Brief in Support, p. 19 n. 11 (citing *Owen v. City of Independence*, 445 U.S. 622, 100 S.Ct. 1398, 63 L.Ed.2d 673 (1980)).

These same defendants previously have raised the qualified immunity defense before this Court as a basis for granting them summary judgment in *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School Dist.*, another suit brought by a female student at the Bradford high school raising constitutional claims stemming from sexual abuse suffered at the hands of Edward Wright.<sup>43</sup> This Court held that the defendants were not entitled to qualified immunity, concluding that a reasonable person would have been aware that the plaintiff had a substantive due process right to be free from intrusions into her "personal privacy and bodily integrity." *Stoneking*, 667 F. Supp. 1088, 1102 (W.D. Pa. 1987). We stand by that conclusion, and deny the individual defendants' motion to dismiss on the basis of qualified immunity.

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<sup>43</sup> Wright's sexual abuse and harassment of Kathleen Stoneking began in the fall of 1980. The first incident of abuse consisted of Wright forcibly kissing her, and as time progressed the abuse greatly accelerated both in terms of frequency and intrusiveness. The assaults continued on an almost weekly basis until Stoneking's graduation in the spring of 1983. See *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School Dist.*, 667 F. Supp. 1088, 1090 - 1091 (W.D. Pa. 1987).

## **ORDER**

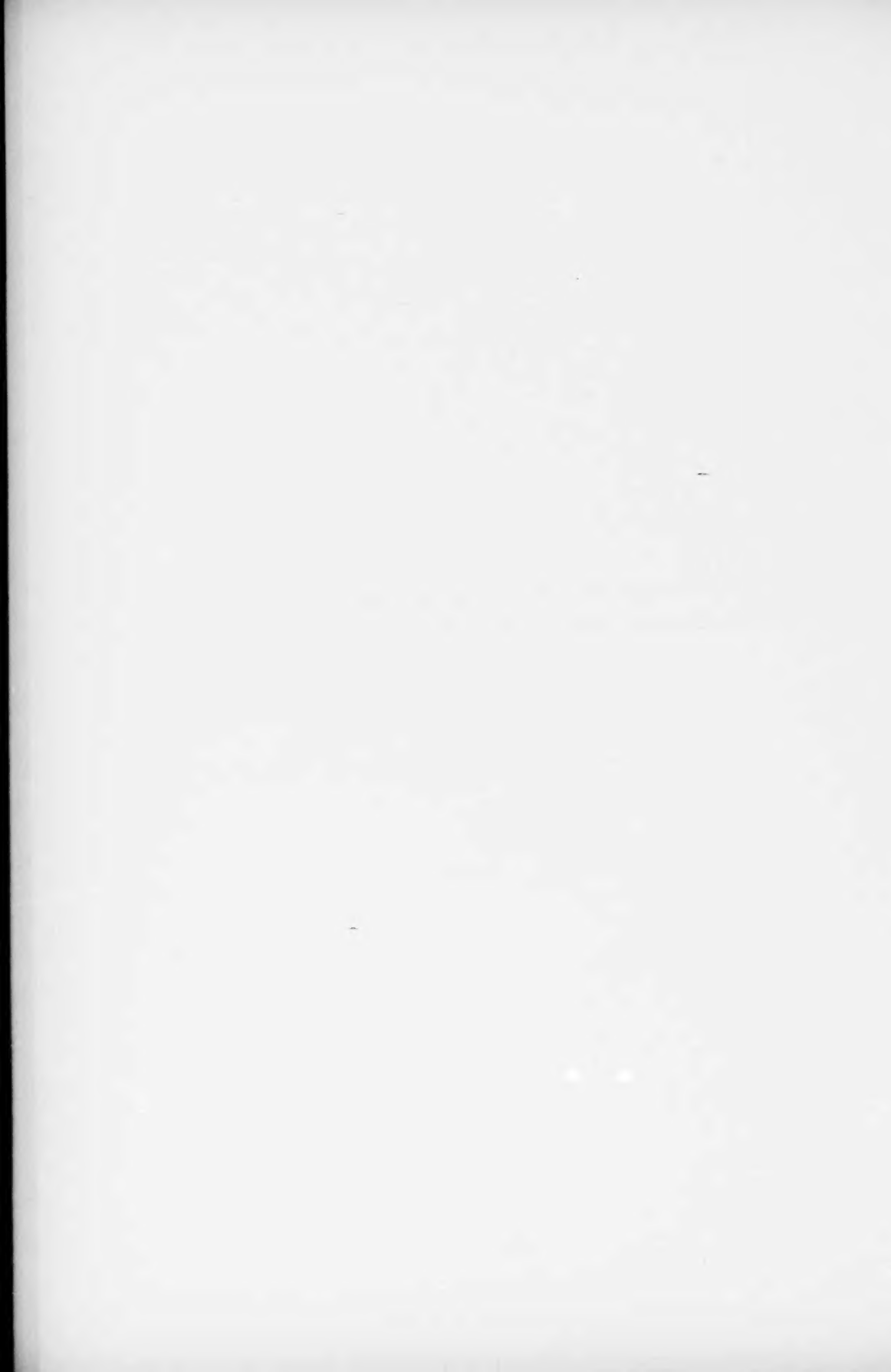
AND NOW, this 29th day of August, 1988, after careful consideration of the Defendants' Motion to Dismiss, and for the reasons set forth in the accompanying Memorandum Opinion,

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the Defendants' Motion to Dismiss is DENIED. -



**J. Order of U.S. Court of Appeals for Third Circuit,  
No. 88-3640, January 31, 1989**

*Sowers v. Bradford Area School District, et al.*



UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE THIRD CIRCUIT

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No. 88-3640

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**JUDY GROVE SOWERS**

v.

**BRADFORD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT;**  
**FREDERICK SMITH**, in his individual and  
official capacity as Principal of the  
Bradford Area High School; **RICHARD MILLER**,  
in his individual and official capacity as  
Assistant Principal of the Bradford Area High  
School; and **FREDERICK SHUEY**, in his  
individual and official capacity as Superintendent  
of the Bradford Area School District,

Frederick Smith, Richard Miller and  
Frederick Shuey,

*Appellants*

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On Appeal from the United States District Court  
for the Western District of Pennsylvania  
(D.C. Civil No. 88-00057 E)  
District Judge: Honorable Glenn E. Mencer

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Submitted under Third Circuit Rule 12 (6)  
January 26, 1989

BEFORE: GIBBONS, Chief Judge, and SEITZ  
and GREENBERG, Circuit Judges

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JUDGMENT ORDER

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After consideration of all contentions raised by appellants, it is

ADJUDGED and ORDERED that the order of the district court of August 29, 1988 be and is hereby affirmed.

The court notes that our jurisdiction is limited to review of the order of the district court insofar as it denied appellants' motion to dismiss on the ground of qualified immunity. See *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 530, 105 S.Ct. 2806, 2817-18 (1985). Thus, our judgment should not be understood as affirming the order of the district court to the extent that it denied appellants' motions to dismiss on other grounds.

The court enters this order as it believes that *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School District*, 856 F.2d 594 (3d Cir. 1988), cert. petition pending, is essentially controlling here.

Costs taxed against appellants.

BY THE COURT,

/s/ Morton I. Greenberg

ATTEST:

/s/ Sally Mrvos, Clerk

January 31, 1989



**K. Order of Supreme Court of the United States,  
No. 88-1350, April 3, 1989**

*Smith v. Sowers*



SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES  
OFFICE OF THE CLERK  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20543

April 3, 1989

Mr. Kenneth D. Chestek  
Murphy, Taylor, et al.  
518 State Street  
Erie, PA 16501

Re: Frederick Smith, individually, and as  
Principal, Bradford Area High School,  
et al., v. Judy Grove Sowers  
No. 88-1350

Dear Mr. Chestek:

The Court today entered the following order in the  
above entitled case:

The petition for a writ of certiorari is granted. The  
judgment is vacated and the case is remanded to the  
United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit for  
further consideration in light of *DeShaney v. Winnebago  
County Department of Social Services*, 489 U.S. \_\_\_\_\_  
(1989).

Very truly yours,

/s/ Joseph F. Spaniol, Jr.,  
Clerk



**L. Order of U.S. Court of Appeals for Third  
Circuit, No. 88-3640, September 28, 1989**

*Sowers v. Bradford Area School District, et al.*



UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE THIRD CIRCUIT

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No. 88-3640

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**JUDY GROVE SOWERS**

*Appellee*

v.

**BRADFORD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT;**  
**FREDERICK SMITH**, in his individual and  
official capacity as Principal of the  
Bradford Area High School; **RICHARD MILLER**,  
in his individual and official capacity as  
Assistant Principal of the Bradford Area High  
School; and **FREDERICK SHUEY**, in his  
individual and official capacity as Superintendent  
of the Bradford Area School District,

Frederick Smith, Richard Miller and  
Frederick Shuey,

*Appellants*

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On Remand from the  
Supreme Court of the United States

On Appeal from the United States District Court  
for the Western District of Pennsylvania  
(D.C. Civil No. 88-00057 E)

Submitted Pursuant to Third Circuit Rule 12 (6)  
September 8, 1989

BEFORE: GIBBONS, Chief Judge, and GREENBERG  
and SEITZ, Circuit Judges

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JUDGMENT ORDER

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The within matter having been remanded to this court by judgment of the Supreme Court of April 3, 1989, for further consideration in light of *DeShaney v. Winnebago County Department of Social Services*, 109 S.Ct. 998 (1989), and our previous judgment having been vacated by the Supreme Court, and we having reconsidered the matter on the basis of the original record and the further briefing by the parties and;

It appearing to the court that despite the less compelling factual circumstances, an affirmance at this stage of the litigation is essentially required by the panel's opinion on remand from the Supreme Court in *Stoneking v. Bradford Area School District*, No. 87-3637, decided August 16, 1989, and see IOP Chapter 8C, it is

ADJUDGED and ORDERED that the judgment of the district court be and is hereby affirmed; and

It is further ORDERED that the matter is remanded to the district court for further proceedings.

Costs taxed against appellants.

BY THE COURT,

/s/ Morton I. Greenberg

ATTEST:

/s/ Sally Mrvos, Clerk

September 28, 1989